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MARCH 1957

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COMPLETE

William L. Hamling
Editor

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Front cover painting by Malcolm Smith, illustrating, "The Tattooed Man"

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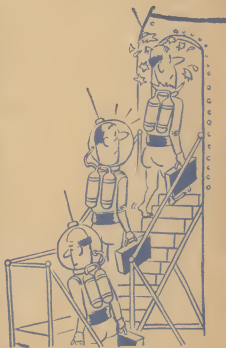
The Editorial.....

BEFORE THIS ISSUE went to press Alex Blade stopped by to admire the cover for his lead novel this issue, THE TATTOOED MAN. He felt that Malcolm Smith had done a fine job of painting—as usual—and hoped that Smith would be able to illustrate his next story. By coincidence Smith was also in the office and he promptly told Alex it was easy to paint a good cover when he had a good story to work with, such as the Blade novel. We promptly enrolled both of them in *Tales'* mutual admiration society! While they blushed with some embarrassment, we hastened to add that we felt they had both done terrific jobs, and furthermore that the readers would back us up when the issue hit the stands. So, ok, let's hear from you!

WE WELCOME back a real old friend this month. Robert Moore Williams has been one of our favorite writers for many years—we used to buy plenty of his stuff when we held down the post of managing editor of *Amazing* and *Fantastic* in the forties. We've been after Bob to turn out the type of action story he helped make popular and he promised he would. You'll be seeing him around pretty frequently from now on we have a hunch!

BACK IN 1938 your editor, in collaboration with Mark Reins-

berg, sold his first science fiction story. Since then—and before—Mark vowed he'd turn out plenty of science fiction. Until recently his professional activities in the field have been confined to reviewing science fiction novels for the *Chicago Tribune* book section. We're happy to report Mark has turned to fiction now making up for lost time. And about time, too! See you next issue. wh





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THE TATTOOED MAN

by

Alexander Blade

THE GIRL WITH the golden eyes and warm green skin was becoming too friendly. Joe Chattan shook his head at her and laughed. He was a little drunk, but not too drunk to re-

member that he had to be back aboard the *Phoebus* by midnight. He dropped two coins together into the girl's bodice, and patted her cheek, and left her, steering a difficult course between the crowded



tables.

Outside the low doorway, the steaming air of the world called Rigel Two did very little to revive him. One big bright moon was overhead, and another was in the act of setting. The shadows ran confused between them, and the coils of mist were like silver floss, blowing gently through the streets.

Feeling as though his own head was beautifully stuffed with mist and moonshine, Chattan smiled and set out toward the starport.

The streets straggled every which way. This quarter near the port was crowded and squalid, like similar quarters all over the lanes of

galactic trade. The houses were flat-roofed, with high narrow fronts, and they were full of smells and cries, laughter and muffled voices, shaded lights. There was nothing to tell a drunken spaceman which street he was on. Chattan got lost.

"Oh, well," he said to himself cheerfully, "there's no problem. All I have to do is stop and listen."

He stopped, with the bright mist curling around him. He listened.

In a few minutes he heard the distant, deep-toned thunder-clap of a ship in take-off. A streak of fire mounted slowly up the sky. Chattan turned himself to face it and began to walk again.

The streets twined and twisted, narrowing, widening, crossing open courts, clambering up and down steps. The moon was playing a game of its own, shifting stealthily around the sky so you couldn't get a bearing on it. Pretty soon, in a court between four quiet walls, Chattan stopped again.

He listened.

He did not hear any ship. But he heard another sound.

The confused, fierce, furtive sound of secret violence.

Chattan's face tightened and his eyes became foggily alert. There was a narrow alley opening off one corner of the square, and the sound seemed to come from there. He went quietly over to it. He was not in search of trouble. He was merely curious, and in the back of his mind hovered the thought that a fellow spaceman might be in need of help - - a not unusual thing in neighborhoods like this.

He looked into the alley.

In the chequered moonlight, he could make out the forms of four men. One of them was half crouched with his back against the wall, moaning like a hurt beast and striking out with his hands at two of the other men, who pounded and battered at him. The fourth man stood by and watched, his tall body bent forward in an attitude of intense excitement.

"Now," he said. "Now!"

He spoke in good Earth English, and Chattan frowned.

One of the attackers moved in swiftly and struck down, hard. The man with his back against the wall whimpered and slid to the ground.

Instantly the two had him pinioned, his arms behind his back and his face strained up into the moonlight. It was a dark face. It looked black, but it might have been any of a dozen colors by day. There was a network of silvery markings on it, scars possibly, or some form of tattooing. It was a good face, with a fine high brow. It was also, incongruously, the face of an idiot. The eyes stared, full of fear but without understanding. The mouth opened and closed and panted, but no word came out, even of protest.

The tall Earthman who had spoken before said, "Hold him." He bent closer to the pinioned man. "Lugach," he said. "Lugach?"

The dark man whined and tried to break away.

The Earthman spoke rapidly, almost savagely, in a language Chattan did not know.

The dark man made no response, except to whimper.

In what amounted to an outburst of insane fury, the Earthman struck the dark man several times across the face, continuing to speak in that unfamiliar tongue.

Chattan stepped forward. He had only one good reason. He was mad. It seemed a hell of a way to treat a helpless halfwit.

The halfwit suddenly voiced a mighty cry and sent sprawling the two men who held him. It was as though those blows in the face had shocked some deep-buried center of pride and human rage. He sprang forward at the Earthman.

"Good for you," said Chattan. He charged at the two men who were getting up off the ground and preparing to attack the dark man from the back.

After that nothing was very clear to Chattan. The moonlight was full of fists and a bobbing in and out of angry faces. Curiously, there were no weapons used. But the men were good fighters. They knew all there was to know about alley brawls. Chattan found himself on the broad of his back, and when he looked around he saw that the halfwit had the Earthman down, and that the other two men were beating and kicking him away. Chattan got up, shook his head, and charged again.

This time he got hold of the Earthman. He had a very brief but fairly clear glimpse of a thin intense face, corroded to the soul with one of those austere passions that amount to monomania, and that leave no room for any softer consideration of mercy or common

fairness. Chattan's drunken perceptiveness saw this, and saw also that this man was no ordinary thief or footpad, but something much more dangerous.

He understood suddenly that he had stepped into something evil and complex, something that was none of his business.

And it was too late, entirely too late.

ALL AT ONCE the Earthman had a weapon. Chattan saw it. He grappled for it, his hands around the Earthman's wiry wrist. The Earthman came in close against Chattan, his eyes glazed and shiny like two big beads, his mouth twisted. The weapon made a quiet hissing. Smoke sprang from Chattan's uniform coat. He gave a deep shuddering groan and fell down into the dust.

He had a dream there. He was all alone, floating in a silent brilliance that reeled and swam, and he was in very great pain. After a while the moon came down to look at him, and the closer it got the darker it got, until it was all black except for a seaming of silver. Then even the dream was gone.

When he woke again the pain was still there, but dulled and far off. The queer brilliance was gone, swallowed up in a flat grayness of painted metal against which a single

light-tube burned. There was something familiar about that metallic ceiling, and that particular type of fixture. Chattan frowned, and then he remembered, and a vague alarm that had been plucking at him subsided. He was looking at the ceiling of a ship's cabin. It was all right, then. He had made it back to the *Phoebus*, after all.

He lay feeling peaceful and relaxed, listening to the heavy throbbing whine of generators in the deep vitals of the ship. The *Phoebus* was already in overdrive, out between the stars. He must have been unconscious a long time, he thought. He could not remember anything about take-off, or acceleration run, or shift.

The generators sounded funny, somehow, but he refused to let it worry him.

The cabin door opened and a girl came in. She looked at Chattan and smiled and said, "You're awake. That's good. How do you feel?"

She came and bent over the bunk, and Chattan stared at her. There were no girls aboard the *Phoebus*.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Taking care of you."

"Yes, but *here*. Aboard ship."

She looked at him, puzzled. "I live here."

She was a small girl, one of

these pert, peppery types, with brown hair cut short, and extremely blue eyes. She moved lightly, as though her slim body was made all of spring steel. She looked competent. *Tough* was the word that came to Chattan's mind, but it wasn't quite the right one, because her eyes were compassionate and good-humored.

He said weakly, "Since when?"

"All my born days," she answered wryly, and then asked. "Where do you think you are?"

A small wedge of panic entered him and widened rapidly. He looked past the girl, around the cabin. It was not his. The sound of the generators became even stranger in his ears.

He said, "The *Phoebus*?"

She shook her head. "This is the *Merry Andrew*. It's a carny ship. Travelling show, you understand? It belongs to my father, Doc Brewer. I'm Betta." She began to peel the sheet back, exposing his chest. "What's your name? You didn't have any papers on you when Lugach brought you in, nothing to tell - - -"

"Lugach!" Suddenly Chattan remembered the fight in the alley, the idiot, the Earthman with the wild fanatic face. He looked down at himself. His left side was bandaged. He remembered the Earthman's weapon, and he remembered falling. . . .

He began to sweat. "What happened?" he said. "I mean, after - - -"

"After you were hurt? Lugach came back to the ship, all beaten and bruised. He was carrying you. He can't talk, but we've got so we understand him pretty well. We gathered that men had attacked him, and you had saved him, and been hurt doing it. We thought at first you were dead. Dad wanted to leave you behind, but Lugach roared, and of course he's our main attraction, so Dad has to keep him happy. So we brought you along!"

"Well," said Chattan. "Thanks."

She grinned. "I put in for Lugach. It seemed the least we could do." She was checking the dressings, very skillfully.

"Didn't you even try to find out what ship was missing a mate?" he said angrily. "I suppose you realize I've lost my berth and probably my ticket - - - I'll have one blazer of a time explaining - - -"

She answered curtly, "You're alive, aren't you? Be thankful for that." She pulled the sheet back up. "We didn't have any time to ask around. Dad just bundled up the show and took off. We can't afford any more trouble than we've got, mister, and when we found out that Lugach had been attacked again, we - - -"

"Again?" said Chattan, startled.

"This is the second time. Before, it was on Mars. Two men came

around to the show, and they asked my father a lot of questions about it, and about Lugach, where he came from and so on, and Dad was feeling good as usual, and he fed them a fine line of taffy, all lies. That night the same two men tried to kidnap Lugach. Rival show, I guess. We couldn't think of any other reason."

"Was there a third man? A tall Earthman, kind of fanatic looking, with a thin face?"

She shook her head slowly. "I didn't see anybody like that."

"He's the one who shot me. And he seemed to know Lugach. Personally, I mean. He called his name, and he spoke to him in some language I don't know. He seemed to be *questioning* him, and then he went into a wild rage when he didn't get any answer. Started beating him - - -" Chattan paused, and then asked, "Who is this Lugach, anyway?"

"Just a harmless idiot," said Betta, with a note of fondness in her voice. "Dad bought him a couple of years ago, off a tramp skipper who'd picked him up at Algol One - - - you know, that unfederated system they call Thieves' Star. How he got *there*, is a puzzle. But dad figured he'd be a draw as a curiosity. Wait, I think there're some posters here."

She began to rummage in a locker. "Don't believe a word of what

it says, though. Dad made it all up out of his own head, on account of the way Lugach is tattooed. All we really know about the poor soul is his name, and we wouldn't know that if it wasn't tattooed right on his own hands. Yes, here they are."

She turned around, holding a gaudy poster. On it was a picture of Lugach, full length, in a striking pose, wearing nothing but a fancy kind of short kilt. His skin showed here as a deep garnet color, almost black, and it was patterned all over with the weird silvery markings. His face, in the picture, was lofty and remote.

The legend, splashed in huge letters across the poster, said LUGACH --- KING OF THE FIRST-BORN! SEE THE MAN FROM THE HEARTWORLD, CRADLE OF HUMANITY --- WIN A THOUSAND CREDITS IF YOU CAN READ THE MYSTERIOUS RUNES OF POWER WRITTEN ON HIS SKIN BY THE HANDS OF THE ANCIENTS!

In more restrained type was added, "Standing offer from Scientific and Research Foundations across the Galaxy. You may be the one to solve the age-old mystery of Man's Origin!"

"There isn't any offer, of course," said Betta, "any more than there's really a Heartworld. It's all hog-

wash, but you'd be surprised how many people fall for it! Dad's safe, though - - - the tattooing doesn't mean a darn thing."

"I wonder," said Chattan, with a sudden odd feeling of fear.

"What do you mean?" asked Betta.

"It must mean something to that Earthman," said Chattan. "He was willing to kill me to get it."

CHAPTER II

THE MERRY ANDREW droned steadily through space ---sub-space or hyper-space, whichever you preferred to call it --- heading toward Sirius. And Joe Chattan put in the dull hours of flight and convalescence thinking.

Thinking hard. Because somewhere down in his subconscious mind was the conviction that he was not through with this curious dark struggle, whatever it meant.

He had seen the face of the lean Earthman, and the Earthman had shot him, and left him for dead in the alley. He would be dead now if it had not been for Lugach. Presumably the idiot had run off out of reach of his assailants at that point, and then had come back for Chattan when they left --- probably hurriedly, since the row must have been heard in the surrounding houses.

But the Earthman had paused long enough to take Chattan's wallet, containing all his papers and all his cash. Why? Obviously to make it seem that some ordinary lurking thief had killed him.

And why had he been shot at all? Three active men could more or less easily have subdued one somewhat drunken spaceman. Or they could simply have gone away from him. They had not used any weapons on Lugach. Why then on him?

Obviously, because he had seen the Earthman's face, and he had seen what the Earthman had been up to, and he could tell about it.

The Earthman, Chattan thought, might be someone relatively easy to identify, someone of importance. And if that was so, it was something mighty damned powerful that would drive him to the acts he had committed.

Something connected with Lugach.

Doc Brewer didn't think so. Doc Brewer was tall, good-looking and affable, the sort of man you like on sight and wouldn't trust with a counterfeit nickel. He sat with Chattan in the main cabin, drinking decorously and quarreling with Betta over their show's projected itinerary, which he was drawing up. And he said,

"Some rival outfit is trying to get him, and that's all. If he had his wits they'd hire him away,

but he hasn't, and so they have to use other methods."

"Do you think," asked Chattan, "that he's valuable enough for someone to follow you all the way from Mars to Rigel Two?"

He looked over at the idiot, who was sitting as he always sat, his hands palm-down upon his knees, perfectly still, his dark, silver-scarred face intense and withdrawn, bent over his hands as though some great secret was written on them that he must solve.

Brewer grunted impatiently. "Who said they were the same men? Lugach pulls 'em in everywhere, and there are hungry angle-shooters on every planet." He grabbed suddenly for the chart sheet. "Now what are you crossing out Betelgeuse for?" he demanded crossly of his daughter. "We did fine there the last trip - - -"

"So fine," said Betta sarcastically, "that we left owing nine hundred and sixty-seven credits for fuel and repairs to the *Merry Andrew*, and if we go within ten parsecs of that system you are in trouble." She took the sheet back and drew an emphatic line through Betelgeuse.

"Well," said Brewer grudgingly, "all right. I'd forgotten that."

Chattan was still studying Lugach. The man fascinated him. In spite of his mental lack, there was a nobility about him, the dim

echo of something lost.

"He wasn't born an idiot," Chattanooga said.

"Who knows?" said Brewer.

"Look at his face," said Chattanooga.

"He's no youngster. I'd say he's older than you are by ten years. Those years left marks on his face, and I'll bet you anything you like they weren't lived by an idiot. Look at him now. He always seems to be trying to remember."

"Yes," said Betta. "I know, poor fellow. And he does have a fine head. I suppose it could have been a birth injury that made him that way, even so."

"Or something that happened to him later," Chattanooga said slowly. "A shock - - - torture, an ordeal of some kind - - - those marks on him might be a clue. I've never seen anything like them before."

"That's what makes him valuable," Brewer said. "Nobody else has, either."

"And you haven't any idea what world he came from?"

"Whatever it was," said Brewer, laughing, "it wasn't the Heartworld. But don't tell, or I'll be out of business."

No, Chattanooga thought, it wasn't the Heartworld. Only people who liked to believe in wonders and the truthfulness of myth still clung to that ancient galactic legend. He himself had believed in it as a child. It was a fine stirring legend

and it was a pity it wasn't true, but that was one of the penalties of growing up, that you had to let so many of the fine things go.

IN THE BEGINNING, the legend said, there was one world and one race of men. There were a lot of different descriptions of this world and these men, according to who was retelling the story, but the important fact was the uniqueness of the human race and its appearance on this single world of all the swarming planets of the galaxy.

These men were very wise, and they could do anything. They built great ships that flew among the stars, and everywhere they went they planted colonies, conquering one wild system after another for the use and service of mankind. And, said the legend, that was the Golden Age of galactic man, because the colonists grew and became a mighty empire that spanned the stars, and all men were brothers, united by a single heritage and a single loyalty to the Heartworld from which they came.

But time passed, the legend said, and the people of the colonies lost their singleness of identity, adapting to the different conditions of their different worlds, so that after a while there were many colors among them, and many statures, and many different

tongues. And they forgot that they were brothers, and made war on each other, and the great golden Empire fell and there were ages of chaos, when the people of the colonies sank back into barbarism and the starships rusted away because no one knew how to fly them. And even the Heartworld was lost, except for the nostalgic legend that ran through the folklore of countless scattered stars.

Even of the star called Sol, which if you believed the legend must have been so far on the frontiers of the Empire that it would have been among those colonies first forgotten. Even on Earth, on Sol Three, there were folklore traces of the old story. And that legend did furnish a beautifully simple answer to the problem that had astonished the first Earthly outrovers to other stars --- namely, the prevalence of humanoid races on every world within habitable limits.

A little too beautiful and simple an answer. For the Empire and the Heartworld were only dreams. People who believed in them, and tried to prove they had existed, were in precisely the same position as those Earthmen who had once insisted on the reality of Atlantis.

So Lugach did not come from the Heartworld. But he might have come from any of a score or so known planets, where conditions

had produced that particular shade of skin among at least part of their inhabitants. Which was very little help.

"But the Earthman knew," said Chattan.

Brewer looked at him.

"He spoke to him," Chattan said. "In a particular language. Not Universal, but a particular language."

"Doesn't prove a thing," said Brewer. "Lugach didn't answer, did he? All right. Your Earthman could have been just trying out a language on the chance that it might be the right one." He shook his head. "I don't think Lugach's got a language. Even his name is tattooed on him in Universal script. I think somebody did that so he wouldn't have to learn a new name to answer to every time he shifted around."

"A funny place to put it," said Chattan, "on the backs of his hands, and right way up for him to see. And it's funny how he sits there by the hour, staring at them."

"What else has he got to look at?" said Brewer, laughing. "You've got too much imagination, Joe. You belong in the carny business."

In a curiously sharp tone, Betta said, "Oh, no, Joe's strictly a space-hopper."

"I was," said Chattan. "Lord knows what I am now. That'll be up to Spaceman's Hall, when we land."

"Well," said Brewer, "we can all swear to what happened. You won't have any trouble."

Chattan said, "I hope not," rather gloomily.

BETTA SCRATCHED two more names off the itinerary sheet, and Brewer howled. They began to wrangle again. Chattan looked at Lugach, at the silvery spider-web of lines on his dark skin. They were like tattooing, and yet not like it. They were like the scars of old, thin wounds, and yet not like them. They were like writing, like intricate design, like ---- well, like almost anything you wanted to make of them. His mind reverted to the Heartworld legend.

Lugach sat and looked at his hands.

Chattan sighed. Old tales. Dreams and moonshine. Nothing.

And yet the Earthman had tried twice to capture Lugach. He probably would try again.

Well, thought Chattan, there's a simple answer to that. The Earthman is crazy. It showed in his face, all right. Man with a bee in his bonnet. Whatever he thinks or believes about Lugach, it doesn't have to be so.

Forget it.

It was easy to forget things. He was still weak as a kitten, and all he had to do was close his eyes. The voices of Betta Brewer and

her father receded into a comfortable distance, blending themselves with the background noises of the *Merry Andrew*, the throb of the generators, small iron creakings, whines, and clatterings from the ship itself.

The few animals belonging to the show lived in the central hold, and their somnolent gruntings and occasional statements of resentment or rage came muffled through the ventilator shafts. The human members rattled around in the cabin decks, twenty-two adults in all, including cook and helper, animal man and helper, roustabouts, and performers, but not including the men who actually piloted and served the ship and who bunked on the bridge-deck.

The performers, Chattan had noticed, all seemed to be very young ones on their way up, or worn-out ones on their way down, or middle-aged ones who had accepted the fact that they were not going anywhere. They had transformed the cabin decks into a species of bustling tenement, complete with children of all ages and colors, and the corridors resounded with voices and the thumping of feet, and several different kinds of music.

It probably wasn't a bad life, Chattan thought drowsily, if you had no ambition and didn't care if you were broke. But he wished

he were back on the *Phoebus*, he wished he were in his old bunk right now, sleeping . .

Someone screamed, a knife-edged, nerve-slashing shriek of sheer panic.

Chattan sat bolt upright, so sharply that he pulled his side and almost fainted from the pain. Betta had sprung up, too, and her face was pale. Doc Brewer was swearing looking in mingled anger and apprehension toward the door to the main corridor.

"What," said Chattan shakily, "the hell was that?"

"I'm afraid it's Preek," said Betta.

"Preek?" Chattan had met Preek, a plump butter-colored little Mintakan who did a mind-reading act, and was always as cheerful and indolent as a well-fed baby. He got up painfully and started toward the door. "We'd better see what's happened to him. Maybe one of the animals - -"

"No," said Betta. "It isn't as nice and simple as that. I wish it were. Preek's a genuine sensitive."

"Most of his people are," said Chattan, still prodded by the terror in that scream. "I don't see what that's got to do with it." He continued toward the door.

Feet came running down the corridor, small heavy feet moving fast. Preek burst in through the

door. His golden skin was greyish and his curly brown hair clung to his head, damp with sweat. His eyes, normally sleepy and rather vague, were as wide and dark and shining as the eyes of a frightened deer.

He stopped just inside the door, looking from one to the other, half seeing, half blind.

"A shadow passed over the ship," he said. "Evil and hate went by us, *there!*" His arm described an arc, indicating the passage of something which was now ahead of the *Merry Andrew*. Then he shivered, and his voice sank to a childish whimper. "I can smell death," he said. "Betta, I'm afraid."

He went to her and she put her arms around him. "There, there," she said, but her face was anxious.

Without warning, the idiot rose from his corner and stood up. His eyes burned with a great light. He clenched his fists and cried out in a loud voice.

"Lugach," he said. "*Lugach!*"

"Good God," said Doc Brewer, astonished, "he said his name!"

CHAPTER III

THE CARNIVAL PITCH on Sirius Five was an acre or so of flat dusty ground adjacent to a corner of the starport. The city beyond was indistinguishable from the city on Rigel Two. The same

lofty buildings rose in the distance, glittering in the overpowering blaze of the mighty sun, monuments of interstellar trade erected at this contact point. Between the lofty buildings and the port the same kind of squalid slum spread over the land, a less lovely monument to interstellar relations.

Chattan stood blinking in the relentless glare, watching the roustabouts haul out the light plastic shelters, brilliantly colored and considerably patched. By a lower hatch, the animal man was superintending the unloading of various cages. Chattan said,

"It seems peaceful enough."

"I hope it stays that way," said Betta. "But Preek just isn't ever wrong."

Doc Brewer grunted. "I'm going to get rid of that little curse. I'm sick and tired of having my sleep ruined by his crepe-hanging. A man gets enough trouble without having to worry about it ahead of time."

"When are you going to fire him?" asked Betta.

"Well," said Doc. "Sometime. Soon. When I can find an act to replace him." He went off to oversee the setting-up, and Betta grinned.

"The heck he will," she said. "Dad never fires anybody, and if they leave him he's blue for days." She shook her head. "Poor Dad.

He's no doggone good, and I know it, but what are you going to do?"

She turned to look at Chattan. "I suppose you'll be going back to your ship."

"I suppose so."

"Then I suppose this is goodbye."

"Oh, no," he said quickly. "I'll be back." He reached out and caught her hand. "Listen, Betta. I want to thank you for all you did - -"

She drew her hand away. "It was no more than I'd have done for anybody that was hurt."

"No," said Chattan. "I suppose not. But thanks anyway. And - -" He stepped forward and put his arms around her and kissed her, hard. "That's no more than I'd do for anyone who saved my life."

"Then," she said, in an odd, quiet voice, "you better do the same for Lugach." She withdrew from him, and smiled, and said, "Good luck, Joe, let us know how you come out."

Rather stiffly, Chattan said, "I will. Well, so long."

He turned and walked away from the *Merry Andrew*. Lugach was inside, as a safety measure, and locked up to prevent his wandering or being lured away. After his dramatic statement of his name - - - the first word Doc or Betta had ever heard him speak - - - he had lapsed back into his brooding silence.

Chattan stamped angrily through the dry blazing heat and the dry white dust. He did not understand why he should be angry. It just seemed that Betta might have been a little more ---- well, friendly.

At the edge of the pitch he met Preek, who was helping to put up the light collapsible boundary fence. In a small outfit like Doc Brewer's everybody had to help with the work of setting up and tearing down, and there were two others with him, Shemsi the physical superman from one of the heavy worlds of Betelgeuse, and Lute the Capellan, a small furry individual from aroboreal habitat who did incredible things on the high trapeze. They all stopped what they were doing, and Preek looked at Chattan, and then he turned and looked toward the city. And he said,

"The sun does not shine on you, Joe, and when I turn toward the city I see a red shimmering of danger."

Shemsi said, "Preek knows. You better not go." And Lute nodded solemnly, his eyes shining like emeralds in the silky pale hair that covered his face.

"But I have to," Chattan said, half annoyed at Preek, half upset in spite of himself. The Mintakans were, as Betta said, genuine sensitives, and there was nothing

supernatural about an esper picking up strong vibrations of malice, from the minds of other men.

It was perfectly possible that the thin-faced Earthman had got here ahead of them in a faster ship. A check with port authority on Rigel Two would give him the *Merry Andrew's* destination, and if he was still after Lugach he would certainly come to Sirius Five.

It was also perfectly possible that he knew by now that Joe Chattan's body had not been found, and that therefore Joe Chattan was very likely not dead. He might deduce that Chattan was also aboard the *Merry Andrew*, and he might decide to do something about that, too.

Still Chattan had to go into the city. If he didn't report himself now to Spaceman's Hall and get himself straightened out, he would never get another berth on a decent ship, let alone a master's ticket.

So he nodded to Preek and the others and said, "Thanks anyway for the warning." and walked on into the hot crowded streets of the city.

MONEY WAS MADE in the high serene towers, and great decisions were carried out that affected whole sectors of the galaxy, but it was here in the swarming starport quarter that life was lived, noisily, actively, and with no little

violencē.

Men and women of every color in the human spectrum, dressed in every conceivable costume, moved like a sort of sticky kaleidoscope along the streets and around the market squares and in and out of the bars, tenements and gambling houses. They were the poor of the galaxy, the deserving poor looking for a better break, the undeserving getting rich on dishonesty and vice, the merely incompetent settling like the blown dust into the puddle where chance had put them. Mingled with them, but not of them, were the men from the starships, living it up to last them until the next worldfall.

It was all familiar to Chattan. He had been here before, and he had been in a hundred other places just like it. It should not have been disturbing, or menacing.

It was. The glare of Sirius blinded him in the open street, but under the walls and in the covered ways the shadows were black and full of whispers and unseen movement. It was hot, and he sweated, but the sweat turned cold on his skin. The babel of voices, raucous cries, music, colors, smells, the swirling pushing movement of crowds, all confused him, and he felt that under cover of these distracting things he was being followed, watched, threatened.

He cursed Preek. He stiffened

his back and walked steadily, neither slow nor fast. Once or twice he yielded to temptation and looked behind him, but he could not see anything in particular. About halfway to the Hall his new-healed wound began to ache and a great weakness came over him. I'm not able to do it today, he thought, I'll go back to the ship and rest until tomorrow. Then he thought angrily, Bull! I'm just looking for an excuse to duck, and I'm damned if I will. He walked on, his jaw set grimly.

Nothing happened.

Spaceman's Hall was a typically shabby building crowded in between a house of joy and a poverty-stricken importing firm. Everywhere there was a starport there was a Hall, adjunct of the Interstellar Spacemen's Federation, where a member in good standing could apply for a job or iron out a grievance, or try and explain why his ship had taken off without him.

Chattan went inside, into a narrow longitudinal hall with several doors. The doors had signs over them. About midway down was one that said SECTION 6, and under it "M. Quard". Section 6 of the Federation's Standard Contract covered violations of the type Chattan was concerned with. He opened the door and went in.

Quard was a Sirian, a large dark man behind a cluttered desk.

There were two other men with him. They looked up as Chattan entered, and they smiled. They were both Earthmen. Chattan knew them. He had seen them once before, by moonlight, in an alley on Rigel Five.

Chattan stopped. The two Earthmen got up, and Quard said to them, "Is this the man?"

One of the Earthmen looked at a photograph attached to some papers he held in his hand. He looked at Chattan, and said, "Yes."

Quard said, "Chattan? These men have a warrant for your arrest."

Chattan took a step forward. "Arrest!" he said. "That's good, coming from them. Look, those are my papers they stole from me, after their pal shot me and left me for dead." He leaned over Quard's desk. "How can they arrest anybody? They're not cops, they're ---"

"But they are," said Quard, cutting him short, "I've already checked into that, very carefully."

Chattan looked from him to the Earthmen. "I don't believe it," he said, and measured, desperately, the distance between himself and the door.

ONE OF THE MEN had now moved and placed himself between Chattan and the exit. The other shrugged and produced credentials.

"I'm Barbour," he said, "and my partner is VanFleet, Earth Planetary Police, Detached Unit, on special duty with Interstellar Research, empowered to make arrests under Interstellar Code regulations covering the rights of nationals. Here's the warrant."

Chattan read it. It authorized the arrest of Joseph Henry Chattan, a national of Sol Three, for assault with intent to commit great bodily harm upon the person of Laurence Emmett Harvey, also a national of Sol Three. Details of the assault followed, sworn to by Laurence Emmett Harvey, and by officers Barbour and VanFleet, who had accompanied Harvey as his bodyguard. The details were all there, except one.

"You forgot," said Chattan, feeling the sweat run down his back, "the most important thing of all. You forgot Lugach."

Barbour said, in a tone of mild puzzlement, "Lugach? What's that?"

Chattan turned again to Quard. "There're lying," he said desperately. "This Harvey thought he'd killed me, but he didn't quite, so now he's taking this way to shut me up. He and these two so-called officers were beating up one man in an alley, a poor devil of an idiot who couldn't defend himself ---"

"An idiot?" said Quard, frowning. "What are you talking about?"

"A freak from a little carnival. They'd lured him away, and these two beat him down and held him while the other man, Harvey, tried to force him to talk."

Barbour laughed. "Well," he said, "that's one for the books."

VanFleet laughed too. "Mr. Harvey collects a lot of things, but carnival freaks just aren't on the list. I'm afraid you were seeing things that night, Chattan. You were blind drunk. Crazy drunk, I should say."

Chattan said to Quard, "I have witnesses."

"Present them in court," said VanFleet. He laughed again. "But you're going to have a hard time making any judge believe that Laurence Harvey goes around beating up carnival freaks."

Now, through the reactions of fear and frustration that were clouding Chattan's mind, that name --- Laurence Harvey --- linked itself with the name of Interstellar Research, and rushed suddenly into center focus. Interstellar Research, biggest of the giant commercialized research corporations that bulked so large in a galaxy dominated by technics. Chattan swore under his breath, feeling the imponderable weight of millions of dollars and the power they can buy descending on his head.

"So that's who it was," he said. "Laurence Harvey. One of the

three directors of Interstellar. No wonder he didn't want to be recognized."

Barbour and VanFleet closed in. "Come along, Chattan."

Chattan sprang.

He drove his fist hard into Barbour's face, feeling the flesh splay out like soft rubber under his knuckles. Barbour fell aside, and Chattan caromed into VanFleet. VanFleet grappled with him, and they danced round and round in a sort of wild waltz, Chattan striving to free his arms and hit VanFleet, VanFleet trying to hang on and at the same time to hit Chattan. Quard stood up behind the desk and shouted at them, punching buttons.

Chattan pulled back and landed a solid kick in VanFleet's gut. VanFleet let go of him and bent double, his mouth open. Chattan bolted for the door, but Barbour was on his feet again now, with blood dribbling out of his nose and a grin of pure fury on his face. He had pulled a gun out from under his tunic.

"Stand still," he said to Chattan, "or I'll cut you in two."

Chattan hesitated. There were voices and movement in the hall now, men running. VanFleet was still struggling for breath. Chattan looked at Barbour's gun.

"You going to kill me here," he asked, "in front of witnesses? Mr.

Harvey won't like that."

"Just stand still," said Barbour. He began to walk forward.

The door burst open. Men came in, asking what the trouble was. Chattan took the last chance he was going to have. He flung himself straight at the group bunched up in the doorway.

There were eight, maybe nine men there. Even so, he almost made it, through them and into the hall beyond. Almost. Not quite. They caught him and held him, pinning his arms, and a second later he felt the hard little snout of a gun rammed into his spine, and Barbour's voice said, "I told you to stand still."

He stood still. There was nothing else to do.

CHAPTER IV

TIME HAD PASSED. Chattan knew that because the lopsided patch of sunlight from the high window had moved all the way across the opposite wall and was now disappearing altogether. The room was getting dusky, so that the figures of the three men looked shadowy and enormous.

Harvey, VanFleet, and Barbour. Barbour, VanFleet, and Harvey. Shuffle and reshuffle. Play it hard, play it soft. Play it anyway, and it still added up two angry men and a hungry one. Chattan shook his

head and blinked, and tried to see clearly the face of Laurence Harvey.

It was Harvey's turn again. and he was playing it soft.

"You didn't understand that night," he said, "and I don't blame you. It looked bad, what we were doing. Of course it did. And I made things worse, I admit. I shouldn't have shot you. But my nerves aren't good, Chattan, not at any time. I panicked. I thank God I didn't kill you, and I'll make it up to you any way I can - - money, a job, anything you want. Now is that fair?"

Chattan said, "Just let me go. That's all I want."

"Later," said Harvey. "This isn't settled yet. It's important that you understand- -"

"I understand," said Chattan. He spoke with some difficulty because his lips were cut and swollen. "You're crazy. You've got money enough to go ahead and be crazy, and nobody cares. You can buy guys like Barbour and VanFleet, by the dozen if you want 'em. What do they care if you're crazy?"

"But I can't buy you. Is that it?" asked Harvey, and smiled. "All right, I'll accept that. It isn't true that every man has his price, no matter what they say. Then I'll have to get at you another way."

He leaned over Chattan in the gathering dusk, his pale thin face alert and quivering, his eyes bright with that look of austere and ruthless passion that Chattan remembered so clearly. Instinctively Chattan pulled back, but the chair stopped him. He was tied to it, so there was nothing he could do but look up at Harvey, and listen.

"I'm a very rich man, Chattan, and the resources of Interstellar Research are practically unlimited. Between them I've been able to do a great deal of studying all over the galaxy. The more I did the more I came to believe that a legend like the story of the Heartworld couldn't have risen out of nothing. Other people have thought that, but they didn't have the money to carry through. I did."

He moved away, walking back and forth, his feet making a dry clacking sound on the floor tiles. The shadows grew thicker in the corners of the room, and the sounds of the city were far off beyond the window. VanFleet and Barbour waited, resting. Their turn would come again.

Harvey said, "You think I'm crazy. I won't argue that. You think I've become a fanatic on this thing, and I won't argue that, either. You laugh out loud when I tell you that the man you call Lugach knows where the Heart-

world is, and I don't blame you for laughing. But you may find it less laughable when I tell you that his name is *not* Lugach, that I know him, know who he is, studied under him and with him on his own world, and sent him out eight years ago on an expedition to prove my theory about the location of the Heartworld."

He swung around, thrusting his face close to Chattan's again, speaking now with a cold furious violence that was shocking to a man tied down and unable to fight.

"The Heartworld had many names in legend. Trace them back, and as the forms of the legend get older the names get older. The oldest ones are Llodoc, Lukah, Hludag. Does that suggest anything to you?"

Chattan closed his eyes to shut out that face so close to his own. The eyes were hypnotic, compelling belief by the sheer force of their own belief.

"It suggests to me that you're willing to accept anything to prove your theory," Chattan said. "Maybe you sent an expedition out, maybe you didn't. I don't know, and I don't care. Maybe Lugach is the man you sent, or maybe you just think he is. I don't know that, either. All I know is you've got no right to steal him, or abuse him. And if you were telling the truth, seems like you wouldn't do

those things. You'd identify the man, return him to his family, be honest about it."

"And let everybody know the story? Let every greedy fool in the galaxy go hunting for the Heartworld and perhaps even find it, before I know myself where it is? Oh no. No. You haven't any idea what's involved, Chattan. It isn't merely the tracking down of a legend. Think what scientific knowledge our forefathers must have had, to tame a galaxy! Think what we could learn- -"

"For the benefit of Interstellar Research?" asked Chattan, and Harvey laughed.

"Naturally. Inevitably. Suppose *you* found the Heartworld, Chattan, with all that treasure of knowledge. What could you do with it?"

"Give it to the galaxy."

"Yes," said Harvey patiently, "but how? Through whom, through what agency? How would you study it, how would you safeguard it, how would you keep out the dishonest and the ignorant?"

"I don't know," said Chattan stubbornly, "but I am not going to help you steal Lugach away from the carnival."

HARVEY'S MOUTH tightened into a thin straight line. Chattan was beginning to know that look too.

"The man belongs to me," said

Harvey quietly. "That which is written on his body belongs to me, and only I can read it. Listen to me carefully, Chattan, once more. I will dismiss the charge against you. I will pay you any sum you may ask, within reason, and I will see to it that you have a life-long job in my organization. And all you have to do in return is to get the man you call Lugach away from the carnival and bring him to me. He trusts you. It shouldn't be hard."

"No," said Chattan, "just impossible. Like you said, he trusts me. So do the others. So go to hell."

"The man needs medical attention," said Harvey, his voice now almost inaudible. "Do you want him to remain an idiot, a hapless freak for fools to gawk at? I can give him the best doctors, the best psychiatrists. I can cure him."

"The kind of treatment you were giving him in the alley he can do without," said Chattan. "And anyway, I don't believe a word of this stuff. You're the one needs the psychiatrists, Harvey."

Harvey reached out and struck Chattan with his open hand, back and forth.

"You're not very bright," he said. "You haven't grasped the situation at all. You talk as though you had a choice."

He turned away, and Barbour and VanFleet stepped in. It was their turn again.

Play it rough. Barbour with the swollen nose, VanFleet with the sore gut. Play it rough, and love it.

"We can boost the charge against you. It's felonious assault now, but we can swear to anything. We can make it attempted murder. We can put you where you'll never see sunlight again as long as you live."

Punctuation marks, shaped with fists. Walls, floor, ceiling, bare and whirling with unsteady pace. Blood, salt-sweet in his mouth, hot and wet running down his chin, out of his nose, from around his eyes.

"What do you care about that idiot? What does he mean to you, why are you so hot to protect him? Do you know something about him, Chattan? Something you're not telling? A clue to the Heartworld? Has he talked? What's behind you, Chattan? Who's behind you?"

"Didn't you hear? He can't be bought. He's noble, that's all. He's not dirty, like us."

One of them, somebody, hit him in the side. Chattan screamed and darkness flowed over him, wrapping him, hiding him. He wanted it to stay dark, but then a light came, a pitiless light to strip him naked

and show everybody where he was. He opened his eyes again. A battery lamp glared from the floor, throwing humped black shadows high against the walls, up onto the ceiling, across the high window. Looking up, Chattan thought he saw a face peering through the window, but he knew it was only his imagination because it vanished when he looked straight at it.

Harvey's turn again.

"Why not be sensible, Chattan? If you're telling the truth, if you really have no interest in this man, except for his welfare, why stand in his way and in your own? Prison for you, a life of mental darkness for him - -"

Chattan tried to speak, and couldn't, and shook his head.

Barbour lifted his head up almost affectionately, and smiled, and said, "And it's all for nothing, anyway, because we'll get him. With you or without you, we'll get him."

"I wouldn't help you bastards get hold of a yellow cur pup," Chattan mumbled, and tried to bite the wrist of the hand that was holding him.

The single flimsy door into the room exploded inward without warning. A very tall, broad man rushed through it and caught Barbour up like a small boy in his enormous hands and flung him bodily into VanFleet. At almost

the same instant a small and agile form covered with bright fur sprang down from the high window and settled on Harvey's shoulders and rode him shrieking to the floor. Chattan stared at them. Shemsi and Lute, he thought, from the *Merry Andrew*, but of course that isn't possible and I'm dreaming- -

Shemsi's great white arms, columns of steel and marble, crashed down upon the heads of Barbour and VanFleet, crash, crash, and their faces went slack and their bodies limp. Lute, clinging to the writhing, wild-eyed Harvey, cried out something about a gun, and Shemsi went over and hit Harvey on the head, and it was suddenly very quiet and peaceful in the room. Preek came in and began to cut Chattan loose from the chair.

Chattan stared at them, still not believing. How beautifully it all fits, he thought. Preek the sensitive, he found out where I was through ESP, and brought the others to help. How clever you can be in dreams. The black shadows danced on the walls and the ceiling, and he felt cold and tired. Someone was shaking him. "Please," he said. "Please let me sleep a while."

Somebody jammed a flask into his mouth and poured drops of liquid fire down his throat. He

came to again in a hurry. Preek said. "Take a little more, that's it. Now we've got to go. Stand up."

Chattan stood. Shemsi and Lute came from where they had been tying up Harvey and the others. Shemsi put his arm around Chattan. "They'll keep for a little while," he said, "with any luck. But they're going to be awfully mad when they do wake up."

They started out of the room, with Chattan wobbling in the grip of Shemsi's arm.

"They're cops," he said. "Real cops. They're bought, but nobody knows that but the three of them. They can make trouble for you."

"We know it," Preek said.

"That was Laurence Harvey," Chattan said, staggering down a long dusty hall. "Interstellar Research. Rich. Crazy. He'll- - -"

"Make trouble," Preek said. "We know. I'm a sensitive, remember? Save your breath, and hurry."

"Ought to let me go," Chattan said. "If I'm not with the carnival, they - -"

Shemsi shook him gently. "Didn't you hear? Preek said shut up."

Lute peered out the front door and nodded. They went out into the night.

THE HOUSE TO WHICH Harvey had brought Chattan stood in an isolated and un-

tenanted little clump of structures due, according to signs, to be razed for the construction of a new warehouse --- a chemical warehouse, belonging significantly to Interstellar Research. They went away from there as fast as they could, through a tangle of dark alleyways between warehouses already built.

"Betta's waiting," Preek said, as they ran. "She hired a ground car, and we got as close as we dared --- There it is."

A battered rental-agency vehicle, without lights, showed dimly under the shadow of a wall. Betta got out of it. She was wearing some kind of a wrap, and underneath it there was a glint of bangles and bare flesh. She must have left the pitch without changing her costume. "Did you get him?" she said. "Good. Good. All right, let's go."

They fairly flung themselves into the car, and Preek took the controls. "I can go faster," he said. "I can see what's around the corners."

He drove, making the streets spin behind them, a broken pattern of dark and light, empty and crowded, noisy and still. Scraps of music and laughter clung to them briefly, then dropped away. Chattan looked at the back of Betta's head.

"Thanks," he said. "But I don't see why ---"

"Preek couldn't stand it any longer," she said. "He could feel them beating you, and you were holding out in spite of it, and it seemed like the only thing to do."

Preek giggled suddenly. "That's only part of the truth. Why don't you tell the rest of it?"

"Just tend to your driving," Betta said.

Chattan's head had cleared enough that he could think a little. And he did not like the shape of his first thought, at all.

"You're in trouble," he told Betta. "Shemsi --- Lute --- the whole carnival. You took a prisoner away from authorized police, and tied them up. Harvey will crucify you for this."

Betta nodded, without turning. "I expect he'll try."

"Oh, damn it, Betta, you didn't have to all go out on a limb for me," said Chattan. "Harvey's crazy, but he's powerful, and ---"

She turned around, at that. "Listen, Joe. You were the one who went out on that limb --- for Lugach. What were we supposed to do --- leave you out there?"

Preek went around another corner fast, and Chattan reminded himself never to ride with an esper driver again. They went past the soaring starport lights and towers, and then the small, tinselly, gaudy patch of lights that was the carnival

came into view.

Business appeared to be good. Doc Brewer had a happy look about him as he came to meet them, but it was a slightly irritated look too.

"Listen," he started in, "don't you know better than to run out between shows and ---" Then he stared. "Why Joe Chattan. What the hell happened to your face?"

Chattan brushed that aside. "I'll explain that later. I don't think we've got too much time."

"Come in the office-wagon," Betta said. "I've got a first-aid kit there. Might as well fix your face while we talk."

In the crowded little wagon, they talked, and as they talked Doc Brewer's happy look left him.

"Harvey, of Interstellar Research? And he saw Shemsi and Lute and Preek? Then we're sunk," he said dismally.

"Would you rather I'd left Joe there?" Betta asked.

Brewer exploded. "Hell, no! If I'd known what was up I'd have gone with you for him. But what are we going to do now? Those three won't stay tied up forever."

"By morning, they'll be yelling for the Port Police," Chattan said. "As for what you're going to do, there're two things you can do. You can give Lugach to Harvey. I'm pretty sure that'd smooth over everything."

He thought for a moment that Doc Brewer was going to hit him. "Give poor witless Lugach to that bastard? Why ---" Then he stopped, and said, "What's the other thing we can do?"

Chattan had been thinking. His mind was not too clear yet but he had at least got hold of one idea, and it came from the words that had passed between him and Harvey in that room.

He said, "You can load up the show and pull out of here right now, tonight."

"Pull out for where? A man with Harvey's influence can run us down and have us arrested anywhere we go!"

Chattan said, "You told me that the captain who sold you Lugach found him on Algol One. Do you know just where he got him there?"

"Sure," said Doc Brewer, "he bought him from one of those plunder-merchants there, a man named Farah ---" He stopped suddenly, and looked shocked. "You don't mean, go *there*?"

"Their warrants wouldn't run at Thieves' Star," Chattan reminded. "It'd give us time. The way I see it, Lugach is the key. Find out who Lugach really is, why Harvey really wants him, and I'm betting we'll uncover enough to tear Harvey wide open and clear ourselves. He sure isn't after Lugach because he believes in the Old Heartworld

myth!"

Brewer looked thoughtful. "Thieves' Star is a tough place to tackle, especially with our money running out. But you're right, they couldn't arrest us there." A speculative gleam came into his eye. "And if Lugach is that valuable to Harvey, it ought to be valuable to *us* to go there and find out why."

Preek spoke up unexpectedly. "You are wrong about one thing, Joe."

"I am? What?"

"Harvey *does* believe that Lugach is the key to the Heartworld. He believes in the Heartworld, utterly. In his mind, I read it."

Chattan was astounded. "Oh, no, you must have been wrong, Preek. He's too clever to chase myths."

"He believes," said Preek.

They stared at each other. Doc Brewer mopped his suddenly damp brow, and said,

"What the devil have I got into, anyway? The Heartworld, is it? We'd better get out of here, and we'd better get damned fast!"

CHAPTER V

THE MERRY ANDREW raced clumsy and creaking, toward Algal. Its clearance papers, hastily made out with the Port Authority on Sirius Five, gave

Canopus as its destination, but then nobody who was headed for the Thieves' Star ever admitted it.

Algal was a curiously anomaly in those days of Galactic Federation, and a thorn in the side of galactic law - - a rogue star whose worlds had chosen to remain independent, outside the Federation and free of any of its codes and contracts. They did not recognize any law but their own, and they laughed at extradition. The result was that the worlds of Algal were probably the richest in the galaxy, for the least amount of exertion. The loot and plunder of a galaxy came here to be sold in the biggest thieves' market in history. Countless men, their pockets heavy with ill-gotten fortunes, came for a healthful change of climate. The Algolians smiled, and raked in the profits.

"A devil of a place," complained Doc Brewer, "for practically honest people to be going. It's as good as admitting we're guilty of something."

"Well," said Betta crossly, "what else could we have done? We'd be behind bars now, and we could rot there for all Harvey cares. At least this way we'll have time to try and find out what's behind all this."

"If Harvey doesn't catch up with us first," said Brewer.

"We'll be on even terms with him

if he does," said Chattan. "He doesn't have the law at Algol, nor his corporation, to back him up."

"He's still got money," said Brewer, "and that's good anywhere."

Over in the corner Preek swore irritably. "How do you expect me to do anything with all this babble going on? This is work for a Class One esper in the first place, and I'm only a Class Three. Give me a break, please."

They fell silent watching Preek. Shemsi and Lute were there too, and Gurtharn the animal man, holding one of his smaller charges like an ailing baby in his arms. Preek sat in front of Lugach, who was in his usual place, in his usual attitude of silent brooding.

"I can't deep-probe him," Preek said. "A Class Three is frankly just not good enough. But I might be able to get something that would help us, if I could slip down through the top layer of his mind. You've no idea what a mess it is - - - cloudy gray, with slashes of color, mostly red, and full of outlines you can't quite see, like houses in a fog."

He shook his head. "It feels different, though, somehow, from the first time."

"What first time?" asked Chattan.

"Well, when Doc brought him aboard I took a sort of a fast

survey of him. I didn't see anything then but fog, and I'm not sure I do now, but it seems - - - thinner."

Preek settled his shoulders. His eyes got vague and unfocused. At first he was quiet, and the room was quiet, so that even the sounds of breathing seemed loud. Chattan glanced at Betta and she smiled nervously and dropped her gaze. Lute fidgeted, his small restless body shifting audibly. Gurtharn stroked the bug-eyed ball of fur in his arms.

Then Preek began to talk.

"Gray. Clouds running, coiling. Hiding. Warm, full belly, no physical pain, but the red color is fear. Behind the cloud is fear, is danger, is pain, is dead-living flayed tortured I- - -"

Preek's face contracted in a grimace of anguish. Sweat gleamed on his skin. He sat rigid and did not speak again.

Now Betta looked at Chattan, and at Doc Brewer, with increasing uneasiness. Lute stopped fidgeting. They waited.

Preek whimpered. His eyes closed and he swayed on the chair. Chattan half started to his feet. And then as though the intrusion of Preek's mind into the clouded mists of his own had triggered some fateful reaction beyond anyone's understanding, Lugach flung up his head and looked at something

that was not within the iron confines of the room. He looked at it as a sane man looks upon a recognized and dreadful shape, and then he raised his hands as though to shield himself, and cowered back, and shouted --- two words, three words, then nothing, and his mouth froze in the act of screaming.

Preek fell off the chair. He rolled over feebly, shook his head, and began to crawl away from Lugach. His face was white.

Doc Brewer was on his feet. "What did he say? What did he say?"

"I don't know what he said," Preek muttered, "but I know what he was thinking." He fetched up against the opposite bulkhead and sat there, panting. "I pushed. I pushed real hard, to get down past the clouds, and I guess I don't know enough about this business, or I can't control it right, because I think I opened up a way for him, too."

"Well, what was it?" demanded Doc Brewer. "What did you see?"

"A star," said Preek. "Green. Evil. Deadly. Coming to kill me." He got unsteadily to his feet. "The hell with that. I'll never go in *his* mind again. I'm just a poor little Class Three, and I want to live."

He went out of the room. Betta

had gone over to Lugach. She was standing helplessly beside him, her hand poised in mid-air over his shoulder. Lugach himself was doubled up now, shivering, his hands covering his head.

Chattan, feeling wretched, as though he had witnessed the torturing of an animal, went over to Lugach and bent down. He put his hands on the dark shoulders with the enigmatic silver marks, and said, gently, "Lugach. It's all right, it's all gone now. You're quite safe, Lugach ---"

And suddenly the black anguished eyes were looking straight into his, and the tattooed hands were making a violent gesture of negation.

"Lugach," he said, two or three times, coupled with unintelligible words. He spoke urgently, as though it was imperative that Chattan understand, saying *Lugach* and then the words in whatever language was native to him, possibly the same language in which Harvey had spoken to him in the alley. Chattan said, "I'm sorry, I don't understand. Lugach ---?"

THE DARK MAN THUMPED himself on the chest and said, "Shoba Ruk! Shoba Ruk!", and for a moment Chattan felt like a small boy reprimanded for his stupidity. He said in Universal, "Your name is Shoba Ruk."

And in clear, perfectly articulated Universal, the dark man said, "Yes, that is my name, Lugach is danger great danger if I die someone should know. Someone should know. Not Laurence." He leaned toward Chattan. "Not Laurence. That would be folly as great as theirs. Help me to - - - to tell - - -"

"Oh, Lord," said Chattan, "he's slipping away again." He caught Shoba Ruk and shook him. "Tell what? What do you want? I'll help - - -"

But Shoba Ruk slipped, quite literally, out of his hands and fell on the deck and lay there, breathing heavily, but otherwise still.

They looked at him, and at each other.

"He's fainted," Betta said. "Too much of a shock. I hope we haven't hurt him. Preek never meant - - -"

"Do you suppose we better try and bring him around?" Brewer asked.

"I think," said Chattan hesitantly, "we'd better just let him alone." In spite of his concern for Lugach, or Shoba Ruk, he could not help a sense of tremendous excitement. "He did speak though - - - really speak. That proves he wasn't always an idiot. And he said Laurence. Did you hear?"

They had.

"Say it *was* Laurence Harvey he meant," said Doc Brewer. "What did he mean? What shouldn't

Laurence know? And what's all that stuff about the green star and danger, danger? It sounds crazy to me!"

Chattan didn't answer that at once. He bent over Shoba Ruk and said, "Shemsi, will you give me a hand? We ought to get him to his bunk - -"

"I'll do it," Shemsi said, and picked up the unconscious man as though he had no weight at all. "We'll take turns to watch by him," he said, and went out, with Lute tagging after.

Gurtharn, holding the little animal tenderly between his great hands, looked after Shoba Ruk and said quietly, "I think he's hiding from himself, in his own mind. When Preek began to wake his memory, he was afraid and went unconscious. Like this little one, when life is too much for him, and I find him dead in his cage and must comfort him and coax him to come alive again."

The creature narrowed its big round eyes and bit him happily on the finger, and Gurtharn laughed.

Chattan came back to Doc Brewer. He said, "So it sounded crazy to you. I don't think so. I think maybe Preek just gave you the key to a pot of gold."

"How so?"

"The green star. Doesn't it all add up? Laurence Harvey, Shoba Ruk, expedition, some discovery

Harvey is frantic to get his hands on, something Shoba Ruk doesn't think he ought to have, something at or near a green star. Something valuable."

Betta caught her breath and said, "Do you think it might really be the Heartworld?"

"Harvey believes it. Preek said so. That's what he sent Shoba Ruk out to find. I'm beginning to think we'd better keep at least an open mind."

Doc Brewer swore. "Well," he said, "I'm damned. No. No, it isn't possible, and I'll tell you why. I've billed that son of a gun all over the galaxy as the Man from the Heartworld, and I've never told the truth yet on a billing. It's a tradition with me."

Remembering suddenly something Harvey had said, Chattan asked, "Why *did* you bill him that way, Doc? You must have had a reason."

"Sure I did. That tattooing. Didn't you ever hear the story, about how the real men of the Heartworld took to marking their hides in a special way nobody else could duplicate, so they'd be known anywhere they went, and so nobody could pretend to be one that wasn't? I guess that would have been after there were plenty of colonists around. Anyway, when I saw the way Luga - - - I mean, Shoba Ruk now, was marked, that

was the first thing popped into my head. I supposed actually some tribe way back on a system you never heard of had done it, but it seemed like a safe enough lie. I never figured it might be the truth."

He thought about it a minute, and then he said, "Aw, it can't be. I just can't believe it. That fairy tale?"

Betta said, frowning, "We do know Shoba Ruk himself isn't from the Heartworld. Even if he did find it, why would *he* be tattooed?"

"I don't know," Chattan admitted. "But Harvey said he could read what was written on his skin. Well, maybe we can find out more when we hit Algol, and maybe Shoba Ruk might still be able to tell us. But I know one thing."

"What's that?" asked Doc. "As if I didn't know."

"Shoba Ruk doesn't want Laurence to have something, and I don't want him to have it either. Because whatever it is Laurence is trying to steal it, and he's scared witless that some word of the find will leak out before he can do that."

CHATTAN WAS SUDDENLY beginning to see sense behind Harvey's wild behavior.

"Say it is the Heartworld that Shoba Ruk found. That would be-

long to the whole galaxy, wouldn't it? The Federation government would take it over, protect it, administer it, and see to it that any scientific secrets found there were properly handled. Am I right?"

"Perfectly," said Brewer.

"Well, then, Harvey's problem is simple. If he wants to take all that scientific knowledge for himself, he's *got* to get there before anyone else knows about it, and before the Federation can step in. To do that, he's willing to commit any crime from kidnaping to murder, and as long as we've got Shoba Ruk we're front and center in the firing line."

"So?"

"So as I see it, the only way to save our necks, and incidentally keep Harvey from the biggest steal in history, is find that green star before he does and then scream to the Federation."

"Yes," said Doc Brewer, smiling slowly, "that sounds pretty good. It would make us heroes, with knobs on. And more important, I can think of at least forty ways it could make us rich."

"I'll bet you can," said Betta, and shook her head. "I'll buy your idea, Joe, but I'll tell you - - I don't think we've got a hope of finding that star unless Shoba Ruk himself comes to and tells us."

He did not. And two days later by the ship's chronometer they

raised the white blaze of Algol and edged their way into that triple system, leaving the more distant sun to starboard and passing well above the other half of the eclipsing binary, Algol's "dark" companion that was itself almost as bright as their own remembered Sol. Presently in that overwhelming sea of radiance they picked up a planet glittering like a diamond, and settled in for a landing on Algol One.

It was a hot heavy planet, and a stormy one. It was pouring a mighty rain when the *Merry Andrew* landed, and the roar of the run-off into the underground drains was deafening when the motors stopped.

"I'll leave it to you," Doc Brewer said to Betta, "to see that the show is set up, ready for tonight. We're about broke from running out on our last pitch, and besides, it'll look better if we act normal." He stopped and looked into the cabin where Shoba Ruk lay in his bunk. His eyes were open, but he seemed if anything more distant and beyond human communication than ever. Shemsi and Lute were there.

"You watch him," Doc Brewer said. "Don't let him go out, and don't show him."

Shemsi nodded. Brewer and Chattanooga and Preek went on to the lock. Chattanooga, feeling that they might need all the help they could get, had suggested taking the sensitive

along.

They climbed down the ladder and stood in the roaring, pouring rain. "It'll let up soon," said Brewer. "Come on, let's get on to Farah's."

Doc led the way off the starport and into the city. The rain stopped as suddenly as though someone had turned off the tap. The double sun came out and Chattan gasped with the light and heat. Instantly a million signs, banners, flags and pennants hung over a million doorways took fire in an explosion of color. They were in the bazaar quarter --- or perhaps more correctly they were in the bazaar that was itself a giant city.

Thieves' bazaar, heaped with the loot of a galaxy, and not one item there honestly come by. Chattan had heard all about it from spacemen, but now that he saw it he didn't believe it. The vast rambling honeycomb of buildings, in every conceivable material from native stone to gaudy plastic, held such hoards of rare and wonderful things that the eye was dazzled by the ever-shifting pattern of shape and color, the glitter of gems in a dark barred window, the richness of furs and fabrics from distant worlds, objects of art beautiful, grotesque, reflecting a million different tastes. Curios, drugs, human merchandise --- everything brought a price on Algol One. Chattan knew,

and was not surprised, that many a respectable firm had dealings with this thieves' market.

Doc Brewer stopped at a meeting of four main ways, looking up and down. "That's the street of the drug-sellers," he said, muttering to himself, "and what's down that way I don't know, but --- yes, the place we want must be up ahead."

He started on again, and Chattan said, "For somebody that hasn't been here before, you seem to know your way pretty well."

Doc Brewer said uncomfortably, "To tell you the truth, I was here once, an awful long time ago. I wasn't much more than a kid. For Pete's sake, don't tell Betta. She knows too much about my shortcomings as it is."

They went a little further, panting and steaming in the heat. Two or three times now Brewer stopped to ask directions, and presently they came into a square roofed over against the sun with crimson silk. On one side was a broad doorway with a sign that said simply, FARAH'S. Inside it was dark and cool and quiet. There were a few things around on stands and in niches, which even to Chattan's uneducated eye were obviously treasures. There was nobody in sight when they came in, and they hesitated, looking around. And suddenly Preek said in a whisper, shivering,

"There is someone watching us, with the eye of a hunting leopard."

Hangings parted at the back of the room, and a man from Fomalhaut, as white and slender and graceful as a fine blade, and with exactly the eye Preek had mentioned, nodded to them and said,

"I am Farah."

Doc Brewer began to talk, and Farah listened. Chattan tried to watch Farah's face, but the light was too dim to show any shades of expression, so he couldn't judge whether or not Farah was lying when he said,

"Off hand I do not remember such a man. You're sure your friend bought him from me."

"He was definite. Yes."

"Hm. Well, it's possible. So many things pass through my hands. A tattooed man, you say? An idiot? How long ago? Let me get my records. They will show exactly, all the details."

FARAH TURNED and went out again, swiftly. Once more they stood in the quiet room, uneasy, waiting. And once more Preek spoke, in a hurried undertone.

"That man is a thief and a liar. His mind is a maze --- I get lost in it. Blood --- he kills easily, for profit, not for pleasure. And now ---"

"Isn't he getting the records?" asked Brewer.

"Yes, but there are others with him. Damn! If I could only see more clearly --- He's sending them away, they're going away, and Farah's mind is busy reckoning ---"

"Reckoning what?" asked Chattan.

"Money," said Preek. "And bodies. Ours."

Farah came back with a micro-book spool and clipped it into a viewer.

"Now let's see," he said. "It would have been about this time --- yes, here it is. Adult male, origin unknown, distinguishing marks --- yes, yes, I remember now." Farah smiled. "He had the word *Lugach* tattooed on his hands, and he was a complete idiot. I bought him as a favor from a friend of mine who was hard up, and resold him at a fair profit to your friend."

Very carefully Doc Brewer said, "Do you happen to remember where your friend got him?"

Farah seemed honestly to be thinking. "Somewhere in space, I think. I seem to remember something about a lifeboat ---"

"Would you," asked Brewer, trying to keep his voice steady, "remember about where in space?"

Farah shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he said, and laughed. "It hardly seemed important. But, if it's important to you, I can try to find out. Of course, my time is

valuable to me ---"

"We'll be very happy to pay you," Brewer said. "It is important to us --- sort of a, uh, personal matter."

"Give me a day or two," Farah said. "Where can I reach you?"

Doc Brewer told him, and they went out again, into the heat that did not seem to be diminishing in spite of the lowering sun.

"What did you think?" asked Brewer, and Chattan grunted.

"That's a man I wouldn't turn my back on. Still, he's probably telling the truth. How about that, Preek?"

"Truth," said Preek absently. "Yes. But let's go that way, around the corner."

Brewer protested, but turned, and then at Preek's urging they doubled twice more in the maze of winding streets.

"Those men he sent out of his place," said Preek finally. "They're following us."

The shadows were long in the streets of the thieves' bazaar. Overhead the signs and the banners blazed in the slanting light. Men went by, soft-footed, sharp-eyed, and every one of them was potentially an enemy.

Chattan said, "Where?"

"Just around that last corner."

"Okay," said Chattan. "Doc, you walk on, like you're walking now, straight ahead. Preek, you

see that opening there between those shops? Right under the green banner with the sunburst on it. When we get there, you and I will turn in."

"I don't like to separate," Doc protested.

"You won't have to go far. Down to the next square, and wait." The alley mouth was beside them now, narrow and dark between the building walls. The huge banner rustled overhead. Chattan and Preek turned into it. When they were out of sight of the street they ran, over the crooked stones, until the uneven line of the wall gave them a niche to hide in. There were doors and windows unevenly spaced. Lights showed in some of them, and somewhere, languidly, a woman was singing.

"Quiet," murmured Preek, pressing nervously against the wall. "One is going on with Doc. The other's turning in."

The shadows grew thicker in the crooked lane. Chattan stood still, waiting, his head turned so that his cheek touched the warm, crumbling plaster.

Footsteps came, light and wary, across the stones.

Chattan shifted his weight, drawing a slow breath.

A man came into sight, moving very cautiously, looking from side to side. He saw Chattan at the same instant Chattan saw him. He

stopped short and his hand flew to his belt, but Chattan was on him before he had time either to draw or run.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAN WAS LEAN and wiry and vicious. He did not want to be held. He gave Chattan the knuckles of his two fists in a double uppercut, and the point of one bony knee in the belly. Chattan pulled his head back so the doubled fists just grazed his forehead, and the knee he managed to slide off onto one hip. He was angry, angry at being followed, at being pushed around, at being made the goat for other people's plans, at the whole mess he had got into through one simple act of mercy. He hit the wiry man. He hit him hard.

"Now, then," he said. "Why are you following us?"

Black eyes glared, dazed and furious, out of a brown face. Chattan shook him.

"Farah sent you. Why?"

"You ask him. I'm only a hired boy," gasped the wiry man. "He doesn't tell me why. Let me go."

"Not until I find out - -"

"*Watch it!*" said Preek suddenly, but it was too late. The wiry man had got his breath back and begun to yell.

"Thieves!" he yelled. "Murder!

Help!" His voice shrilled and echoed from the crowding walls. "Shut up," said Chattan fiercely. "Shut up!" But the damage was already done. Heads appeared in windows and doors opened.

"Let him go," Preek said. "He doesn't know, anyway. For god-sake, let's get out of here."

Chattan gave the man a final blow to shut his mouth, and then he and Preek ran back along the alley and into the street again. They slowed to a fast walk and caught up finally with Doc, who was waiting anxiously at the next square. Pursuit, if any, was left behind.

"As near as I could get from his mind," Preek said, "he thought we were queer people to be dealing with Farah, and he figured Farah thought so, too. Maybe that's true. I suppose we did look a little funny coming in there asking questions about a tattooed idiot."

"Is the other one still with us?" asked Chattan.

"Like a mother."

Chattan contemplated further action, but gave it up. "We wouldn't get any more from him than we did from the first one. And I suppose in Farah's line of work it's automatic to be suspicious of people you don't know. Just the same, damn it, I don't like to be spied on."

"Well," said Doc Brewer uneasi-

ly, "I don't either, but I reckon we'll have to put up with it until tomorrow, anyway. Farah might know something by then, and anyway, we won't have money enough to buy fuel to get the *Merry Andrew* off until after the show. Maybe not then, if business isn't good. But I guess it might be a wise idea to keep guard on Lugach every minute."

They went on back to the ship. And night came on slowly, with hot winds and a burning radiance of stars.

Betta had done a good job setting up the show. Many-colored lights danced in the wind, splashing the plastic tents with glimmers of green and gold and red. Betta, in silver spangles, was doing her come-on - - an acrobatic sort of dance involving rings, bars, and a padded platform. She was only moderately good at it, but her lithe little figure and bright personality brought the customers in. After a while, when she had them softened up a bit, Shemsi came out and tossed her around, gently and with splendid ease, so that she looked like a silver leaf whirling high among the lights. The crowd, half tolerant, half openly scornful but with a what-the-hell-it's something-to-do expression, began to buy tickets and pass in. Doc Brewer held up crossed fingers.

"It looks like a good night," he

said in the tone of one too often betrayed.

Chattan agreed that it did. But the hot wind ruffled his hair the wrong way and the ground felt wrong when he walked on it, and all the familiar shapes of ship and carnival grounds were somehow changed and threatening. Nerves, he thought, and strolled back and forth, but the feeling didn't leave him. He went inside the *Merry Andrew* and checked on Lugach, or Shoba Ruk - - having got used to one name, it was hard to change. He remembered Laurence Harvey's voice saying, *The oldest names for the Heartworld are Llundoc, Lukah, Hlundag. Lugach.* Was it possible, really, that the name tattooed on the hands of Shoba Ruk was the true name of the lost cradle of humankind?

Shoba Ruk still lay in his bunk. Shemsi and Lute were busy with their performances, and the cook and his helper were standing guard.

"He's quiet enough," said the cook, "but he's been talking. To himself. I couldn't make any sense of it. Nekru here thought he recognized the language, but he wasn't sure, and- -"

CHATTAN SWUNG on the helper so intently that the man was startled. He was a long gray lazy man, from one of the nameless star systems that dot the hinter-

lands of the galaxy much as the nameless villages filled the hills and the wide plains of Earth in the old days. The natives had names for them, but outside them nobody cared.

"Did you understand it?" Chattanooga demanded.

"No, sir," said Nekru. "I only said I thought it sounded like the way a man I worked with once used to talk, and he looked like this fellow, too. Only had his wits, of course, and he wasn't tattooed. But otherwise he looked like him, Same color. Not that *that* means anything by itself."

"No," said Chattanooga, digging his nails into the palms of his hands, "but if they looked alike and spoke alike it might mean something. Where did this other man come from?"

"Some little star system way over beyond Eridanus. I can't remember the name- -"

"Please?" said Chattanooga. "Try."

Nekru looked at him, and then frowned in an agony of effort. "Thir. Thir-something. I think. It was a long time ago. Thirban? Thirbar? Something like that."

And that was the best he could do. Chattanooga went and leaned over the bunk. "Shoba Ruk," he said. "Shoba Ruk."

The eyes of the dark man flickered. He muttered something in his own language.

"I can't understand you, Shoba Ruk," said Chattanooga. "Is your home at Thirban?"

Again the dark man muttered. Then he moved his head impatiently and spoke in Universal. "Thirbar, Thirbar. Yes. Now leave me, I am very busy."

Chattanooga leaned closer. "Shoba Ruk- -where is Lugach?"

Instantly he was sorry. The long gaunt body in the bunk became agitated, and the face was convulsed. "Lugach," whispered Shoba Ruk, and lifted his hands. "If I write it there I will remember someday if I live, the sight in my eyes, the sound in my ears repeated. Must remember! Danger if- -"

He reached up and caught Chattanooga by the front of his jacket. His eyes blazed.

"Laurence, this power is not for one man. I forbid you. You are like them, greedy, proud and stupid. Old stubborn parents who would not let go the swaddling bands. Stupid, stupid, pitiful, and you're like them. You must not."

He let go and sank back, smiling. "Anyway, you can't. You have not the key of entrance to the vault. And the green star kills. I only am left alive."

His eyes closed, and then a minute later he opened them again and said testily, "I am busy. These things must come in order, don't you understand that? Get out. Get

out."

Chattan stepped back from the bunk. The cook and Nekru were staring, scared but fascinated. Chattan's heart was pounding.

"Watch him," he said. "Every minute. And if he says anything you can understand, for God's sake remember it."

He ran out of the cabin, out of the ship, back to the carnival pitch where the red and green and yellow lights danced in the hot wind, and the good-paying crowd pushed among the bright-colored booths, and the recorded music gave out sounds of brassy cheerfulness. He looked for Doc Brewer, and found him in the office wagon, counting the take.

"Pretty good," said Doc. "We can buy fuel- -"

"I've got something better," Chattan said. He told him briefly what Shoba Ruk had said. "I think he's coming round, back to sanity. He's having to do it his own way, slowly, remembering things and trying to arrange them properly. There ought to be someone with him now all the time, with a tape-recorder to take down everything he might say. I think- -"

Abruptly, with the suddenness of a blow, the lights went out.

There was a second of absolute silence. Then Doc Brewer said, "The generator- -", and in the same moment all over the carnival

pitch voices rose, dismayed and querulous. Chattan jumped down from the wagon. The portable generator was close by, and he started toward it in the dark. To his right he could make out the curving row of booths and the massed yeasty movement of people. The music had stopped with the lights, and there was no sound but the voices and the trampling of feet.

He heard Doc Brewer come out of the wagon and go toward the booths, calling out that everything was all right, just a little generator trouble, nothing to worry about. Then a woman screamed with the sharp insistence of real fear. A man's voice took it up with a cry of, "Look out!" Then, on top of those two voices, smothering and crushing them down, an avalanche of noise descended - - - howls, shouts, the cries of frightened animals, the stamping of feet and the crashing of falling things, with an obligato of female screaming above it all.

Doc Brewer came back, running. He ran into Chattan, saw who it was, and pulled him on. "For God's sake get the lights back on."

"What is it, a panic?"

"It's one now, all right, but it sounds like a clem to me."

"What's that?"

"Fight. Raid. Where the natives come in and wreck you. Hear

that?"

SPLINTERING CRASHES, bel-lows, sounds of rage and turmoil. Chattan thought he could hear Shemsi's great voice. The portable generator loomed in the night in front of him, housed in its own bright plastic hut. It was not working. Doc Brewer stumbled over something on the ground and swore. It was the end of a cable, chopped in two.

"They've all been cut," said Chattan. He straightened up in sudden alarm. "Christ," he said. "Shoba Ruk."

"Oh lord," said Brewer. "You don't think- -"

They began to run again, through the wind and the hot night, toward the *Merry Andrew*. But Chattan did not go all the way. "Let him go," he said to Brewer. "The hell with him. I'm going to find Betta."

"She's all right," Brewer said. "She knows what to do. She's been through these before."

But Chattan left him and plunged into the locked, swaying, struggling mass of people among the booths. Little herds of them broke loose and ran this way and that, knocking things over, trampling each other into the dust. There were moans and curses. Chattan saw the dim outlines of people in spangled costumes trying to lead patrons off the grounds. And now

he saw others, Shemsi among them distinguishable by his great height, fighting savagely with a knot of men who were armed with clubs and bars. Chattan pushed and butted and kicked his way to the central hub of conflict. It too was moving, lurching back and forth as the tide of battle and the outward pressures of the crowd moved it. Betta's ring-and-bar set-up were wrecked, but the platform still stood firm.

Chattan shouted to Shemsi, "Where's Betta? The giant's answer was swallowed up in the noise of the fight, and so was Chattan in the physical motion of it. Bodies banged against his. Hot angry men panted and cursed in his ear. He hunched his shoulders and went at it, trying not to hit anything with spangles on it. The night became an insanely whirling mess of fists, feet, faces, clubs, and dust, all floundering over pieces of wreckage and scfter things that groaned and crawled away.

Then, as abruptly as it had begun, it was over.

The men with the clubs turned and ran away. The last of the patrons were gone from the pitch, except a half-dozen injured who lay on the ground and cried. A hooting of sirens arose in the distance, coming closer. Someone had called in an alarm. Chattan stood panting and looking dizzily around. He

saw Shemsi and asked again, "Where's Betta?"

"I told you she was all right," said Shemsi, and moved the wreckage away from the platform. He opened one side of it and said, "Come out now."

Betta and two of the other women performers crawled out. "Dad calls that the storm cellar," Betta said, and looked around, alarmed. "Where is Dad? He didn't get hurt?"

"He went to the ship," Chattan said. "We thought they might be after Shoba Ruk- -"

They all turned toward the ship. There was no sign of life around the open hatch.

"It is funny," said Shemsi, "how quick it began and ended. And this is not the kind of place where you expect a clem."

Betta made a sharp sound between her teeth and started to run. Chattan and the others went with her.

There was a queer sweetish smell in the open lock of the ship, quite faint but getting stronger as they went along the corridor. Doc Brewer lay on the deck half in and half out of Shoba Ruk's cabin. Chattan thought at first that he was dead, but he stirred when Betta flung herself down beside him and lifted his head, and suddenly Chattan knew what had happened.

"Knock-out gas," he said. "Get him out in the air." He shoved past Betta into the cabin. The cook and Nekru were lying on the deck there. There was nobody else in the room. Shoba Ruk was gone.

Chattan's own head was beginning to reel. A couple of those gas shells could incapacitate a whole ship's company, making it perfectly safe for intruders to come in no matter how many people there might be aboard. It insured quietness, too. Very neatly done, thought Chattan, and staggered off down the corridor carrying part of the cook's dead weight with Preek.

Outside there were still no lights, but a curious crowd had built up around the edges of the pitch. And now the ground cars with the sirens on them swept in.

Chattan, working over the unconscious men, looked up at Preek and said, "Farah did this. Nobody else here even knew about Shoba Ruk, so it must have been Farah."

Preek nodded. He turned apprehensively toward the ground cars and the men who were getting out of them.

"Farah is a power here at Algol, and we are strangers. I wonder now how much justice we're due to get?"

DURING THE NEXT four days, Chattan thought they

didn't get a lot. It wasn't that the authorities were openly oppressive or unfair. They were methodical and thorough, polite, and utterly immovable. There was a law on Algol One. Even a thieves' world has to have some sort of a code to keep it from falling into complete chaos. They asked endless questions, listened to endless answers, and in regard to Farah they always came back to the same remark, "But you have no evidence." Which was perfectly true.

As for Farah, he was gone. His shop was locked tight. The men on either side of it said that he had left on the evening of the day the strangers had been there. They did not know where he had gone. When Chattan asked them if Farah had a place somewhere else, they didn't know that either. Nobody knew. Every face in the city was as blank as a shuttered window, when any question was asked.

"I guess," said Doc Brewer, "our trouble is we're not crooks, and so they figure we're fair game."

"They're sure covering up for Farah," said Chattan grimly. "I tried to check with the port authority to see if he'd taken off in a ship, and they practically threw me out."

Doc Brewer looked with haggard, hating eyes at the crowded buildings of the thieves' bazaar. "Looks like poor old Lugach is

gone for sure. And just when it looked as though he might come round. But what I can't figure out is this. Why did Farah want him?"

Chattan shook his head. With Preek and Shemsi and Lute he prowled the twisting streets, while Doc Brewer fought it out with the law and cleaned the pitch of its bright gay wreckage, salvaging what he could. And they got nowhere. Even Preek could not pick up anything definite. "I think Farah has a place somewhere a long way from here, and I think everyone knows pretty well where it is. I can even get a picture of a big sort of a villa with white walls, and some jungly gardens around it. But that's all, and it could be anywhere. It could be on another planet."

They could not find any trace of the two men Farah had sent to trail them, either, and neither they nor the police could turn up the slightest indication of who the rioters were or how the thing had been planned. Late on the fourth day an official came, placed a formal paper in Doc Brewer's hands, nodded, and went away. The paper gave them twenty-four hours to get fueled and go.

"To prevent further trouble", Doc quoted, and swore. "Well, that's the best yet - -throwing us out of this thieves' den because

we're undesirable!"

"What happens if we don't go?" asked Betta.

"They confiscate the *Merry Andrew*, and probably end up by selling us in the bazaar." Doc's shoulders sagged. "I don't know. I don't see any help for it."

Chattan said furiously, "I'm going to make one more try. Come on, Preek."

They went back into the streets, in a downpour of rain. In bitter desperation, thinking of Shoba Ruk and the dangerous secret he guarded, whatever it might be--thinking of Laurence Harvey and the Heartworld, and the trouble that waited for the *Merry Andrew* as soon as it came again within reach of galactic law--Chattan returned to the square where Farah's shop was, not expecting anything, not hoping, just drawn to it because it was the only focal point there was.

The canopy of crimson silk was rolled up. Rain poured into the square and ran swishing and roaring into a sunken drain. The light was dim and all the colors were grayed, and there was no one in sight. Farah's place was still shuttered, still dark.

"We might as well go," said Chattan. "There's nothing for us here."

He turned away. Preek touched his arm and said,

"Wait."

A man stepped out of a doorway and joined them. He was a little man with a face like a bird, very sharp and predatory, with bright shallow eyes.

"I understand you're looking for a piece of information," he said. "I can sell it to you, if you want to buy."

Chattan reached out and caught him so he could not run away. "I'll buy," he said. "I'll buy!"

Hours later, delayed by refueling and red tape, the *Merry Andrew* took off. But the ship's course was an odd one. When it was well beyond the atmosphere it shot suddenly off on a tangent and swooped back down for a landing on the other side of the planet. There was no city here, no jumble of buildings and unseemly marts of trade. There were vast estates and garden villas, resorts set miles apart in lush jungle and lake and river, every appurtenance of the spacious and serene life. There was one particular villa with white walls, even more isolated than most. And here the *Merry Andrew* came roaring and clattering down in the private dock, its loutish and rusty bulk looking painfully out of place beside the sleek space-yacht that was already there.

Chattan and Doc Brewer left the ship, with Preek and Shemi. Everyone else had strict orders to remain inside. They walked toward

the villa.

Farah and his men met them halfway.

It was daytime here, high noon. Algol blazed in the sky. The jungle smelled moist and green and there were flowers in it, and flowers on the white walls of the house, crimson and orange. Doc Brewer looked at Farah and said,

"Where's Lugach?"

Farah smiled. "Well," he said, "I'll tell you. You're a little late. Laurence Harvey's yacht took off from here this morning, with Lugach safely under hatches." He smiled broadly still, and nodded. "I'm indebted to you, really. I turned a nice, a very nice profit."

"Did you?" said Chattan, and laughed, a loud harsh sound in the green and sunlit quiet.

CHAPTER VII

FARAH LOOKED at Chattan, and something flickered in his eyes. "I suppose you're angry," he said. "And I guess you have a right to be, but all's fair on Algol One. If you can't protect your property, you lose it. It's a kind of game with us, though we play it mostly with outsiders."

"It's a kind of a stupid game," said Chattan. "Don't you think?"

"We rather pride ourselves on not being stupid," Farah said, "but I'll admit I was where the idiot

was concerned. That's why I was determined to make up for it. I bought him, as I told you, for very little, and sold him to your tramp skipper for what I thought then was a good price. But then later an agent of Laurence Harvey's came round and offered a fabulous sum for the creature--and you can imagine my rage. So naturally, when you came to me the other day, and I was sure you had him--"

He shrugged eloquently. "One doesn't like to be haunted by past mistakes, especially where there's money involved. I notified Harvey's agent, Harvey himself got here fast, and I held him up for even more than he had offered before. Now we are both satisfied."

Chattan said, "You poor fool. Do you know what you've done? You've given away the key to the greatest secret in the galaxy. You've handed it to Harvey on a silver platter, for buttons, for nothing. You've given him the Heartworld."

That name rang like a great bell on the silence that followed its speaking. Farah stared at Chattan, and then at Doc Brewer and Preek and Shensi. He drew a deep breath and his mouth tightened.

"I don't think I quite understood you," he said. "Would you repeat that?"

"The Heartworld," said Chat-

tan. "The little idiot has been there. He knows where it is."

Now it was Farah's turn to laugh. "The Heartworld? Aren't we a trifle old for fairy tales?"

"Laugh," said Chattan. "Go on, choke on it. Why do you suppose Harvey was so frantic to get hold of a tattooed idiot- -for a mantel ornament?"

"He told me," Farah said slowly, "that the man was a victim of one of his company's chemical experiments that went wrong, and he wanted to do something for him. I thought what he really meant was to put him quietly out of the way, so he wouldn't make Interstellar Research look bad- -"

"And you believed that?" said Chattan. "You were easy, Farah. You were easy for Harvey."

Chattan had purpose in his taunt. He had been thinking very fast since they had found Shoba Ruk gone. He had been thinking that they had only one chance left now, and that it was in the ruthless thief before them.

They--he and Doc and the *Merry Andrew*--could not follow Harvey, for they did not know where to follow. The only lead left was in what Farah knew, or could find out. If he could play on Farah's greed and rage, the game might not be lost yet. . .

A very hard, cruel light had come into Farah's eyes. "I dislike

to be played with, and I dislike even more to be cheated. You've aroused a doubt in my mind now. I think you'd better clear it up."

Chattan nodded toward the house. "Let's go inside. The story's too long to tell standing here."

Inside, in a long room with shaded windows and cool ceramic panels on the walls, Chattan told the story. Not all of it, but just as much as he wanted Farah to know. And Farah listened, his slim graceful body and his eyes reminding Chattan more and more of Preek's comparison to a hunting leopard.

Chattan concluded, "That's why we asked you those questions about the man. We hoped if we could find out where he was picked up, it might give us a lead to the Heartworld. We hoped we could find it first. But now- -" Chattan shrugged in assumed hopelessness, "--now Harvey's got him, which means that Harvey's got the Heartworld."

Doc Brewer said, "I could kill you, Farah. Poor Lugach. I hate to think what Harvey'll do to him to make him talk."

Farah's eyes became slits of pure anger. "If you're telling me the truth," he said, "and I think you are, Harvey has robbed me of a fortune I can't even count in my mind." He made a furious gesture and sprang up. "He won't get away with it."

"It's only a sort of a game he plays," said Chattan cruelly.

Farah looked at him. "Very well. I deserve that. But the question is--what do we do now?"

"We?" said Chattan.

"It is in my mind," said Farah, "that we could join forces to snatch the richest prize in history out of Harvey's hands, even yet."

Chattan's heart leaped. The merchant-thief was taking the bait as he had hoped. But he made his voice dull and hopeless, as he said,

"Even if we trusted you, Farah ---which we don't---what could we do together? Shoba Ruk was the key to the Heartworld. And he's gone. You gave him to Harvey, remember?"

A hidden fire flashed in Farah's eyes. "Listen, Chattan. You didn't tell me everything. You got *some* clue from Shoba Ruk to where the Heartworld is. Didn't you?"

"We did," Chattan said bluntly, "and I didn't tell you. Anyway, it's not enough."

"But," pressed Farah, "it would be enough, if you knew also where Shoba Ruk was first picked up in space? You said that, you said that that would give you a lead to the Heartworld."

Chattan stared at him. "Now I get it. You're proposing a deal?"

"Exactly," Farah spoke with a wolflike snap. "I can get that information, from the man who did

pick up Shoba Ruk. I can also check fast with Thirbar about Shoba Ruk. If we put together what we know, we can still find the Heartworld."

CHATTAN ASSUMED a look of heavy reluctance. "I don't know. What good would it do to find it---when Harvey's ahead of us?"

"He can't be far ahead," said Farah. "And my space-yacht is even faster than his, for business reasons. We can overtake him, maybe even reach the Heartworld before him. What do you say?"

Chattan looked at Doc Brewer, who looked blankly back at him and said, "Well. I would like to get Shoba Ruk out of Harvey's hands."

Preek looked worried and unhappy, but Chattan ignored him. He had jockeyed Farah into the place where he wanted him, and now there was still a chance!

He said slowly, "All right, Farah. But two things. First, no more than two of your men go with us if we go---"

"You really *don't* trust me, do you?" said Farah, with a nasty little smile.

"That," Chattan assured him, "is an understatement. And secondly---I'll tell you what *we* know *after* we reach the region Shoba Ruk came from."

Farah thought briefly, and then nodded. "All right. I think we understand each other. I'll get busy. I don't think it'll take long -- I've channels of information that even the galactic police haven't."

"We'll be in the *Merry Andrew*," said Chattan.

They went back out of the villa and into the carnival ship. And the moment they were inside, Preek burst into remonstrance. He said,

"I read only one thing in Farah's mind. Treachery, treachery, treachery! I would not go anywhere with that man!"

Chattan nodded. "Of course. He plans to fox us if we actually find the Heartworld. We'll have to be ready and alert -- first to deal with Harvey, and then with Farah."

He turned and said, "Doc, I'd rather you didn't go. Shemsi and Preek and I will be enough. You stay here with Betta."

Doc instantly told him where he could go, so angrily that Chattan said hastily, "All right, all right, come along if that's the way you feel --"

Betta turned and went out of the cabin. Chattan followed, and found her in the dingy cabin where he had first met her.

He said. "I'm sorry, Betta. But Doc *will* come. Don't worry, I'll look out for him the very best I

can."

She turned. There were tears in her eyes. Chattan had never seen her anything but brisk and competent before and he was shocked.

She said, "That's fine. And who's going to look out for *you*? You think you're so tough, but a couple of tigers like Harvey and Farah will eat you like a lamb, and --" She turned away again. "Oh, all right, you big fool, go ahead and die or lose your wits like Lugach. Go on, all of you --"

She didn't finish, because he bent his head and kissed her and then held her so tightly that she had no more breath to talk.

"I'm crazy about you too, Betta," he said. "But listen -- we have to do this. Whatever happens about the Heartworld, we have to nail Harvey and clear ourselves or we'll be on the wrong side of the law for life."

In the next few hours it turned out that Farah did indeed have swift channels of information. Over the interstellar communication system, far faster than light or even than a ship in overdrive, came the information from Thirbar that a man named Shoba Ruk, scholar, archaeologist, and explorer, had left on an expedition to an undisclosed destination eight years before, and was missing and presumed dead. Shoba Ruk, the communique added, was a specialist in compara-

tive cultures and the diffusion of mythology--especially the Heart-world myth. Thirbar was traditionally one of the first colonies, and therefore presumably fairly close to the source. Laurence Harvey, added the message, had studied under Shoba Ruk there for two years.

The other information came from closer at hand. Farah's private spy system, working through the customary channels of the thieves' world, turned up the friend from whom Farah had bought Shoba Ruk on Algol Three.

"He remembered quite clearly," Farah said. "He found a lifeboat drifting. There were three men aboard. Two were dead. The third one was Lugach--Shoba Ruk--as near dead as you can get, partly from starvation. He took him in and fed him up, not realizing until later that the man's mind was gone. Then he sold him cheap to me, because of that tattooing."

"But where?" asked Chattan eagerly. "Where in space did he find him?"

"Beyond Eridanus. In a sector well beyond the sector of Thirbar."

Minutes later, in the chartroom of Farah's yacht, they stared with excited eyes and pounding hearts at the three-dimensional representation of that sector in the tank.

"It takes in an awful lot of

space," said Doc Brewer.

But Chattan, remembering what Shoba Ruk had said, was looking for a green star. It had to be a green star.

In that sector, there were three green stars with planets. Two were well-known, prosaic systems, on the extreme edges of the sector, impossible as candidates for the lost Heartworld.

THE THIRD, ISOLATED in the deep center of the sector, was a posion star. *Lethal radiation*, said the chart. *Planetary system unexplored. At least four ships known to have perished in approach. All shipping warned to stay clear of radiation zone.*

Chattan's heart sank. How could the Heartworld be there? How could life begin on the planet of a star that was lethal to life? And yet--Shoba Ruk himself had said, "The star kills."

Farah said, "I've filled my part of the bargain. Now--where in that sector?"

Chattan knew that, even if he dared trust Farah enough to tell him, to tell him now would end it. Farah would never believe in the last possibility now left.

He said, "Oh no, not yet, Farah. Not till we reach that sector. I'll set the course."

Farah said, "So you're afraid I'll leave you behind if you tell?

All right. We'll start."

While Doc went hastily to get Shemsi, Chattan went to the bridge of Farah's yacht. It was good to be on a bridge again. He had been like a fish out of water ever since that night on Rigel Two. He began the regular pre-flight check, admiring the beautiful modernity of the control system, and trying not to think about Betta, trying to think of anything else, of Harvey and how they would get him, of Shoba Ruk and a poison star.

Farah came in, dressed in a spaceman's coverall. He said suspiciously, "I only brought two men, as you stipulated. But I've got four of you aboard. That little furry chap wouldn't let the big one go without him."

"Lute and Shemsi are great friends," Chattan said. "But if you're worried, we can still call it off."

Farah gave him a piercing look. "I wonder," he said softly, "if you're as clever as you think you are." He strapped himself into the pilot's seat. "I'll take her off. I'm used to her and she's a lot crankier than any freighter."

Warning bells rang, and Farah's hand pressed down on the control board, and the yacht screamed skyward on a trail of flame, up into the blaze of Algol and then, turning away from the triple suns,

it plunged toward the starry firmament.

Unnumbered stars were a great blaze before them, the sprawling magnificence of the galactic spaces, the shining cataracts of the vast star-streams, the pulsing glow of nebulae and brooding blackness of dark clouds and lonely lighthouse sparks of far-drifted stars, all hitting the vision like a blow. Chattan thought that long and long ago the ships of the Heartworld might have sped through these same spaces, and where now were those galactic mariners of old? Lost in myth and fable, lost in shadow - - and where would they be when their own voyage ended?

The warning siren for overdrive screeched, after Chattan had set a course on the computer banks for the sector that was their destination. They made the shift, and then, for a while, there was nothing to do but wait.

And talk. Chattan talked, to Doc Brewer and Shemsi and Lute, out of hearing of Farah and his two silent, watching men. He felt a great and growing doubt, and it made him seek reassurance from them, a reassurance they could not give.

"I'm getting old, Joe," said Doc Brewer, "And I'm afraid. I'm afraid we'll never find Harvey or Shoba Ruk, that they're dead like others that tried to find the Heart-

world."

"But Shoba Ruk was *there*," Chattan insisted. "He was there once, and came away - - we know that from the name "Lugach" that was tattooed on his hands."

He had thought about that, going over it again and again, trying to understand. And he thought he understood now.

"Don't you see, Shoba Ruk must have tattooed that name on his own hands, so that if he lived to get away, the name would make him remember. Which means his memory, his mind, was beginning to go when he did it."

"But what about the other tattooing on him, the silver lines all over him?" said Doc. "He didn't do that to himself. And - - if he felt his mind going, what hellish kind of place was it that he was getting away from?"

That was the thought that haunted Chattan's mind. He thought he guessed the answer to it, but he didn't want to tell that shattering answer until he had to.

Time crawled endlessly on the indicators. Chattan waited, and ate, and slept, and waited, with the bitter taste of defeat already on his tongue. It seemed to him that if Harvey had taken Shoba Ruk to the place that he thought, they must indeed already both be dead, and if that were so, the whole mad venture was useless.

The countless hours became like a strange dream. It was always like that, in overdrive, but this time more than ever before. And he almost dreaded the awakening from that dream, when it finally came.

He had made his calculations with minute care. When they did, finally, go through the cosmic turbulence of translation and ride once more in normal space, the yacht was in space not far from the baleful glare of a great green star.

Farah said, "Now where?"

Chattan nodded to the green star. "There."

Farah looked at the star, and then went and looked at the chart. His face got tight and dangerous. "That's a lethal star. Nobody can go near that. What kind of game are you playing, Chattan?"

The others had crowded into the bridge to see, and they too looked at Chattan uneasily.

Chattan said, "*'You have not the key of entrance to the vault. And the green star kills. I only am left alive.'*" He added, "That's what Shoba Ruk said."

"But it's not possible!" cried Farah. "The radiation of that star kills, at more than planetary distances. How could anyone land on its world? How could a world of that star be the Heartworld?"

"The star," Chattan said, "may

not *always* have been dead. They do change sometimes, you know. It may have changed, in the ages since the Heartworld."

Farah made a violent gesture. "That makes no difference to us. How can a man land there? How could Shoba Ruk have landed there?"

Chattan shook his head. "I don't know. But he said he had. He was very upset about what he found there, afraid Laurence Harvey would find it. He mentioned a vault, and a key to it Harvey didn't have. That's all I know. But he must have found a way to beat the lethal radiation, on the way in, at least."

"On the way out," said Doc Brewer grimly, "I guess he didn't. And that's what happened to his mind."

Farah looked long again at the distant, glaring green eye of ill omen. He said, between his teeth,

"Nobody could go close to that. We've come all this way for nothing- -nothing!"

RADAR AND RADIO were almost useless against the radiation that poured from the green star. They tried to locate Harvey's yacht with them, and they could find nothing.

Farah said, "If he came here, he must have made it. Otherwise the yacht would be drifting, a

derelict. *If* he came here- -"

"Unless he crashed on the planet," Chattan said.

There was only one planet, as far as they could see. From where they hung in space it appeared above them, very tiny and far off, its underside flashing a cold green crescent where the light of the primary touched it. A line of shadow, pencil thin, projected outward from it, lengthening until it was lost in the surrounding dark of space.

Chattan said doggedly, "It has to be the Heartworld. And, living or dead, Harvey and Shoba Ruk are on it right now."

That thought seemed to sting Farah to fury. He cried, "But we can't land. What can we *do*?"

Chattan looked at the planet, the tiny fleck of fire trailing its shadow line. "There must be a way. Shoba Ruk made it, and he didn't have anyone to tell him how, either. Shut up and let me think."

They shut up. The yacht drifted, and Chattan watched the little far-off world move around its sun. Evil-looking child of an evil parent, he thought, and the line of the eclipse is like a black path to- -

A black path.

He cried out, "The shadow! Go in along the shadow, and you have the planet itself as a shield against the radiation!"

Farah turned his head, and sud-

denly his eyes were hot and eager. "Of course," he said. "That must be it. It'll be tricky, running that shadow. It always is, they move so fast. But we can do it."

Chattan's belly was knotted tight inside and the palms of his hands were wet. "We'll take a vote on whether we try it."

"Vote, hell," said Farah. "We go in."

Chattan said, "You can't do it alone, Farah. And everyone here will be risking his life and sanity. I say we vote."

Farah's men, not liking it but more afraid of their boss than of the unknown menace of the star, said yes. Shemsi and Lute hung back and waited for Doc Brewer.

Brewer sweated. Greed and the nobler desire to help Shoba Ruk, and prevent Harvey from stealing God-knew-what that belonged to the people of the galaxy, told him to go ahead. Fear and common sense told him to go back.

"Do you really think it's safe?" he asked Chattan.

"Not safe. Just possible."

Brewer ran his visibly shaking hands over his face. "Oh, well," he said "All right."

And looked as though he immediately regretted it.

Shemsi and Lute nodded, not looking very happy either. Farah said impatiently, "Satisfied?"

Chattan leaned forward. "Let's

go."

The yacht swung in a wide looping curve, seeking the end of that thin shadow-line. The computers clacked, figuring the planet's orbital path and speed. Chattan fed the results to the compensator banks. He made the final check with Farah.

They shot forward, down the black path of the shadow.

And now the body of the planet was between them and the sun, a round disc of darkness quickly growing. Chattan watched it, and listened to the radiation counters, and checked the kick-blasts of the steering-jets that kept them in their narrow, ever-moving lane of safety. One moment of failure, one miscalculation, and the same thing would happen to them that must have happened to Shoba Ruk's lifeboat on its outward trip.

It occurred to him to wonder what really had happened to the original ship of that expedition, and the rest of its crew. It had seemed not improbable that it had simply crashed in landing on a wild world, but now under the circumstances Chattan was not sure. He thought that radiation might have killed them. But that did not explain how Shoba Ruk and two others had escaped.

The planetary disc grew larger, blotting out more and more of the sun. Presently it covered everything

but the sullen fires of the corona, a coiling and writhing of green flames as deadly as the serpents they resembled.

And suddenly Chattan saw something, a curious ghostly gleaming that seemed to surround the planet like a phantom envelope. Before he could speak they were into it. Indicator needles jumped madly on the board, registering not radiation but energy. A brush discharge burned momentarily from every metal surface, and beyond the port a sheeting of white light flared from the hull and was gone.

"Force field!" said Chattan, and stared at Farah. "Good Lord. Do you suppose that's the answer? The whole planet shielded against the radiation?"

"It could be." The yacht plunged downward into atmosphere, into heavy air that screamed along the hull. The radiation counters remained steady. "The atmosphere hasn't been poisoned, at any rate."

"And that means, of course, that the sun wasn't always lethal, and that intelligent minds here erected a shield when it became so." Looking down at the black night side of the planet, so close now below them, Chattan shivered with a thrill of pure primitive fear.

"I wonder," he said, "if any of them are still living?"

"Who?" asked Doc Brewer.

"The First Born. If this is the

Heartworld, really."

"The main thing now," said Farah, "is to find Harvey's ship. We're close enough now. Level off on standard survey pattern."

THE YACHT WENT INTO an orbital path of its own, high enough to avoid the highest possible mountain, low enough to use scanners and detector devices efficiently.

"Field shows nothing but open country below. A few hills, but mostly flat."

"Keep going."

"Still nothing. We're overtaking the terminator."

"Keep going."

The sleek silver yacht shot over the edge of night into a green dawn, weirdly beautiful, dimmed and pearly by the distortion of the sheltering force-field. The country below was a long tumbling slope that fell from snow-capped mountains across half a continent, over rocky ledges and tilted plains, to the edge of a tideless sea. It was noontime there, and the glass-green water lay smooth against the shore, and all along the curving edge as far as sight would carry there were ruins, so huge, so wide, and so very old that the meaning of them was lost and they were only a reminder that some mighty thing had been here and now was not.

In an open space that might

once have been the greatest starport in the galaxy, hub of an empire that spanned a million stars, one minute speck showed, less than a grain of sand in all that emptiness. Harvey's yacht.

Farah's yacht came down beside it.

There was no sign of life there. The hatch was open. There was no one inside. Everything seemed to be in order, but just inside the hatch, on the metal floor, Lute's sharp eyes saw a fleck of red.

"Blood?"

"It looks like it," Chattan said. He listened to the sultry stillness, and felt cold. "We ought to leave a guard. One of your men, Farah, and one of ours."

Farah nodded. He spoke to one of the men, who returned to Farah's yacht. Chattan said to Doc Brewer,

"You, too. Hang onto that gun - -" Farah had an arsenal of remarkable completeness aboard and they had armed themselves from it - -and keep alert. We may need help, and you'll be the only man who can give it to us."

He did not add that he was doing his best to live up to the promise he had given Betta.

Doc Brewer made a perfunctory protest, looking uneasily at the wall of tangled forest and humped ruin beyond the ships. Then he too went back to Farah's yacht,

obviously relieved.

The others, Farah and his gunman, Chattan and Shemsi and Lute, walked across the broken, buried tarmac and entered the forest, going toward the sea.

A breeze went rustling through the treetops. Down below where the men were there was no breeze. They began to sweat. Their boots stumbled among the ribs of stone and metal left there by dead buildings. Presently they came upon a place where an enormous road had run. The forest was thinner here, held down by the adamantine pavement that defied the trees to root.

There was a path.

It was not much more than a rabbit run, but it had not been made by rabbits, and it was used. Chattan's heart began to beat harder. Small silent shouts of alarm rang through his nervous system.

"Something's alive here, then," he said, and Farah nodded.

Lute, who had been glancing around and sniffing uneasily, said, "Wait while I look ahead." He climbed swiftly into the thicker trees and was gone, agile as any monkey.

The others waited. Twice Chattan thought he heard laughter, but it was so muffled and indistinct that he could not be sure. It sounded like the laughter of children playing hide and seek.

Lute came back, scrambling so hurriedly through the branches that he almost fell into Shemsi's arms.

"Up ahead there," he panted. "A dead man. I think he must be one of Harvey's crew." Lute's eyes were wide with horror. "There's something evil here. He - - he was tortured to death."

"Did you see anyone?" asked Farah, and Lute said, "No."

They went on, and again Chattan thought he heard the fleeting laughter.

They found the man. What Lute had said was true. The mutilated corpse was hung like a rag doll on a point of metal sticking up through grass and creepers. The point was shaped like a gigantic sword, and perhaps once it had been part of a monument on this triumphal way.

They left it where it was, not knowing what else to do. Lute took to the trees again. They went on, following the path. The salt smell of seawater thickened on the air.

The ancient roadway ended in a vast square, with the whiteness of marble thrusting here and there through the green- - -marble hands and limbs and noble foreheads, torsos and thighs, scattered like the aftermath of some battle between colossi. At the far side of the square was a building, or rather a part of the walls of what had

once been a building, with the green sea showing through them. Even then, roofless and broken as it was, it was staggering to the mind to look at it and recognize its size. And Farah said, in a tone very close to reverence,

"That must be the Hall of Suns they speak of in the legends, the real heart and center of the old empire. My God. And I never dreamed it was real."

Lute came down from the high trees and said, "The men we're looking for are there. I saw one of them cross an open space inside."

With their guns ready in their hands, they began to cross the ruined square, between the bits of marble. They were about halfway across when Chattan saw the children.

THERE WERE THREE of them, two boys and a girl, crouched behind a marble head that lay on its side and had only the sad blurred outlines of a face. They sprang up giggling when they knew they had been seen, and Chattan thought that they had deliberately let themselves be discovered. They were quite naked, slender and frail-looking, their skin an indeterminate dun color with a greenish cast. They were marked like Shoba Ruk with a tracery of silver lines, and they looked to be about eight or nine years old, but

there was something in their faces that disturbed Chattan, arousing the instinctive revulsion that is caused by something unnatural.

He spoke to them, and they scampered away laughing, peering back over their shoulders with bright secretive eyes. Then they stopped, and the little girl put her finger to her lips and pointed to the walls of the great building. She shook her head and beckoned.

"They want us to follow them," Chattan said.

"Yes, but where? And what are they?" said Farah. "If they're kids, where are their parents? Where do they live? And who killed that poor devil we found on the road back there?"

"I don't know," said Chattan.

Now all three of the children were pantomiming enemies in the great building, enemies lying in wait. They gestured, urging the men to follow in a way they would show them where the enemies would not see.

"They seem friendly enough," Farah said. "They're trying to warn us. Harvey and his men must be waiting for us. They'd have seen us land." He glanced quickly at the gaunt arches of the walls. "We're set-up targets if we go in this way, that's sure. They may know a better one." He made his decision. "It won't hurt to see."

Chattan thought it might very

well hurt, but it was only a hunch based on the look in the children's eyes. He followed reluctantly, crouching low, keeping one eye on the ruins. The children ran ahead, laughing.

They passed through a dense screening growth of shrub and vine. And suddenly the children had disappeared and they were in a huge square bay of the walls enclosed on three sides, where a state doorway might once have been. Chattan and Farah both realized the danger even before Lute's cry warned them. The whole party was diving for cover when the first shot was fired, but it was too late for Farah's gunman, who dropped and lay feebly struggling on the ground.

The children had led them with great care into a trap.

Guns fired now from all three sides of the bay. Lying flat in a thicket that grew between the ancient paving stones, Chattan fired back and tried to figure a way out. There didn't seem to be any. They couldn't go back, and they couldn't stay here pinned down. He counted four guns--Harvey, probably Barbour and VanFleet, one of the crew. Shots were whacking close around him, kicking up dust and chips of stone, searing the leaves of the bushes. Oh hell, he thought, might as well get dropped running as lying still.

"Shemsi," he said. "Lute. Cover

me."

He couldn't see them but he knew they were close by, and at once they began blasting the broken walls and window openings with everything they had. Chattan got his feet under him. He broke from the thicket and ran, and hit another clump of brush, rolled under it and out on the other side, and ran again, sideways, on all fours. Inside the walls somebody shouted. Shots came close, so close he could feel the hot breath of their passing, but he couldn't stop now, he was afraid to stop, if he stopped he was dead. He ran and scuttled and rolled, and there was somebody else with him, going low like a big cat with infinite grace and speed. Farah.

They hit the porch together and fell between the mighty sheltering columns and crouched there panting. Footsteps rang on stone inside. Chattan flung one arm across Farah's chest and pressed him back, into the shadowy back of the niche. A man appeared in the doorway, the giant portal from which the doors had ages ago vanished, but which was still magnificent. It was Barbour, edging cautiously around the jamb of carved stone, dwarfed by its height and size. His face was alert and happy. This was his kind of work and he liked it. Chattan let him get all the way through, looking for them,

and then he shot him, without any regret.

"Come on," he said to Farah, and they ran together toward the door. Just as they passed through it Chattan looked back into the court. The firing was going on without change, but the children had appeared again. There were two or three others with them now. They had crept out of the woods and caught hold of the wounded man and now they were dragging him back into the woods with them. It dawned on Chattan what had so repelled him about them. Their eyes were not the eyes of children, and they were quite mad. He knew now who had killed the man in the road.

HE HAD NO TIME then to say or do anything about it. Inside the doorway he and Farah took different ways, he to the left, Farah to the right. He crouched and peered around the corner, hearing the firing outside intensify as the three out there prepared to make a rush. Harvey and one of the crewmen were firing through the tall windows. He shouted to them to drop their guns. His voice was drowned in a burst of firing from Farah's side. The crewman spun around and snapped a shot at him, and Chattan dropped him. Harvey stood irresolute, his face white and set, and as crazy in its own way,

Chattan thought, as the faces of the maniacal children outside. Farah came running back and said, "There was only one man there. He wasn't as good a shot as he thought he was." His eyes brightened. "Ah," he said. "Harvey."

He raised his gun.

Chattan knocked it down. "Drop it," he said to Harvey. "Drop it while you have the chance."

Harvey dropped it.

The place was quiet now. Shemsi and Lute came in, Shemsi wincing over a flesh-wound in his hip. They all stood around Harvey, and he looked at them like a man who has already died.

Chattan said, "Where is Shoba Ruk?"

Harvey whispered, "Down there."

They turned. And now for the first time Chattan saw the place he had come into, and he forgot everything else for the moment in a rush of awe and wonder.

From this great doorway a double line of columns led for what seemed to the eye an endless distance, across a pavement cumbered now with fallen pediments and the shattered fragments of the roof, but still so long and wide between its enclosing walls that the effect was impressive beyond words. The towering columns supported nothing but the sky, and the green misty sunlight poured in unchecked, and the green ocean showed

through the empty window arches. And all across that mighty pavement, under the dust and wreckage, there was a shining and glittering of jewels.

Blazons of empire in the Hall of Suns. Looking out across them, Chattan was stunned--not by the value of the gems which was beyond counting, but by what they stood for. The pavement itself was polished stone as black and deep as space itself, and all across it the suns and constellations burned, the star-colonies, the bright swarming children of this mother-world of men. Here to this place must have come the embassies from Hercules, from Cepheus and Draco and the shining coils of Hydra, from near and far along the brilliant ever-turning star-stream of the Milky Way. Here had been splendor unimaginable, power and pomp beyond belief. Here had been Empire, beside which the greatest empires of Earth were only as candles to a nova.

Then he heard a rustling noise and looked around. The children with the mad eyes had come into the Hall of Suns, laughing as they darted and crept among the ruins, peering at the stranger men.

A cold shock went through Chattan, bringing him sharply back to reality. The mighty Empire had sown its seed through all the galaxy, but it had not endured. Mor-

tal as the puny empires of Egypt and Hatti, it had come crashing down, and now this was left of the mother world, the Heartworld, the cradle of mankind--this wreckage of stone and flesh, cold-shining jewels, cold-shining eyes, empty, all-forgetting, all-forgotten. He looked up at the lethal star that burned above them, and he wondered, and was afraid.

"There he is," said Lute. "I see him. Down there where that covered arch still stands."

Chattan shook himself. He went toward the covered arch by the west wall, and the others came with him, keeping Harvey in the center. And Harvey's feet dragged heavily on the gemmed stars.

Shoba Ruk lay under the arch, bound and gagged. They freed him. He stood up and spoke to them, and Lute and Shemsi looked at him with a queer shyness. This was not the old Lugach they had known so long. This was a man. Chattan had been right. The process of recovery he had seen started on the *Merry Andrew* had been completed during the voyage out with Harvey. Now Shoba Ruk was gaunt and haggard, a man tortured by the possibility of disaster, but mentally whole. He frowned at Chattan, at Shemsi and Lute, as though he only half remembered them, and then he smiled briefly and said,

"They were afraid I'd cry out and warn you. Now shall I thank God you're here, or is it only an exchange of evils?"

Farah stepped forward, smiling. "I came here for the treasure, if that's what you mean. Harvey tried to cheat me out of it, but I'm very hard to cheat."

Harvey cursed him in a low harsh whisper. "All my life I've worked and studied and believed. But what are you? A thief."

"You're both thieves," said Shoba Ruk. "Harvey a man possessed, and you--I seem to know you, and I have no good memory as I have of these others."

He looked past Farah at the shadows under the arch, where a vaulted doorway showed, open and unguarded, and from there to the children creeping and tittering among the high columns. Then he looked up, at the green sun.

"So," he said, "you want the treasure of the Heartworld. Shall I tell you what it is? It is death and destruction and madness and horror. It is knowledge, yes. It is power, yes. And its fruits are these."

HIS VOICE RANG against the shattered walls, and the children paused to listen.

"The mother-world grew old, like a human mother. She grew jealous and grasping, and when her children tried to grow and think

for themselves she fell into a fury and subdued them with terrible wars, pitting her more obedient sons against rebels. But even that way she could not hold them, and the wars spread and got out of control, and she saw her whole great empire staggering toward collapse, and herself toward ruin. So she isolated herself from the deepening ruin. She poisoned her sun."

He flung up his hand, pointing to the baleful star. "At one and the same time, she rejected her children and protected herself with complete isolation. The force-field allowed life to continue on this planet, but from then on there was no communication with the outside. The parent sun under which life first grew had turned murderous, preventing the mutinous children of the Heartworld from attacking it in force. And the Empire fell, and the Heartworld passed into legend. And here now are the last of your elder brothers, the First Born. Look at them, the fruits of complete isolation, the mad degenerate things who have almost lost the ability to grow up. With each generation fewer and fewer reach maturity. Soon no more will be born at all, and then--"

He made a gesture of finality.

"That is the power Harvey wants. That is the treasure you seek. The knowledge of how to

poison a star."

Chattan was speechless with shock. "You mean they did that themselves, deliberately? How?"

"By upsetting the chemical balance of the solar cycle with certain carefully measured charges, so that the radiation output is altered both in kind and intensity. It's all there in the vault, the whole secret, along with others--mostly weapons and destruction, since that was what they specialized in in the later days. Not one thing beneficial to mankind. I was heartbroken when I first entered it, to find nothing there but death."

Harvey's eyes blazed with dull fire. "It's not for you to judge. You're a scholar, not a scientist."

"And I'm a thief," said Farah softly. "Good enough. This is the greatest hoard in the galaxy, and there's no telling the price it'll bring. I'll take it."

Chattan said, "No."

Farah looked at him and laughed, and raised a gun. Chattan dived in low, the gun-blast searing his shoulder. He groped for the weapon and couldn't get hold of it.

Then, suddenly, right in front of his eyes, Farah's face went purple as two great hands gripped his throat from behind. They were Shemsi's hands, and Shemsi shook Farah once, not gently, and the gun fell from his hand.

The children tittered and drew

near.

"Bind him," said Shoba Ruk, looking at Farah. "I am going now to do what I should have done before. I was afraid to take the responsibility then. Now I know I must. I am going to destroy the vault."

"No," cried Harvey. "No, no. Stop him."

He ran suddenly and placed himself between Shoba Ruk and the open door of the vault.

Shoba Ruk shook his head. "You haven't the key, Harvey. I told you that. You can't enter without the key. And I have it." He touched the silver markings on his skin.

Chattan stared, unbelievably. "You mean---the tattooing on your body is the key?"

Shoba Ruk nodded. "Yes. A metallic pattern, always the same, that lets a man who wears it on his skin pass through the gateway without triggering the forces that guard it." He looked at the tittering children. "They have the key upon them, just as their forefathers long ago had it, a pattern coming unchanged down through the ages. I made friends with these little ones and they put the key-pattern on my skin. They did it gladly---it is very painful, and they enjoy pain. They killed the others, all but two---"

He stopped, and then said, "It

is the talisman, with which the men of the Heartworld guarded their most secret vault. And without it you can't go in, Harvey. Never."

Harvey whispered, "I don't believe you. It's a lie to frighten me away. I won't let you destroy it. It's mine, and the Heartworld is mine. All these years--- There are weapons in there. I'll stop you."

He turned and plunged through the door of the vault.

Instantly there was a flare of white light so intense that Chattan was blinded by it even at that distance. For a fraction of a second Harvey was caught motionless in the center of it, and then he was gone. Literally gone, leaving no trace. They stood, staring, dazed and stunned by the brief and terrible violence of that end.

There was a moment of silence, and then, quite steadily, his head erect, Shoba Ruk went through the doorway into the vault.

HOURS LATER, Farah's yacht approached the final stage of its dangerous journey back along the eclipse-shadow path.

Farah, much subdued, was at the controls with Chattan. Doc Brewer, with Shemsi and Lute beside him, sat very quietly, sweating out the passage and glancing covertly from time to time at Shoba Ruk, who had returned to his old pose

of brooding. Behind them, the Heartworld was only a dark disc against the deadly sun.

"So much power," said Shoba Ruk, hardly realizing that he spoke. "I had it in my hands, and I let it go. I let it go."

Chattan realized that Shoba Ruk was human, too, and tempted by the same things that tempted others.

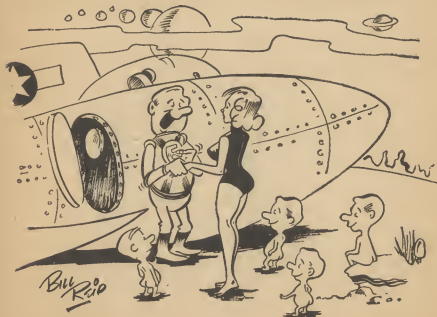
"You did the right thing," he said, looking at the evil green light outside their path of darkness. "No man, no world, should have that secret!"

He glanced at Farah, but the master-thief kept his head averted.

The yacht emerged from the shadow, beyond the danger point.

Chattan looked at free space, blazing with its loops and chains and rivers of stars, the beautiful domain of man given to him by the mother-world in the days of her youth. That glory she had had, that good she had done. Let her memory rest in peace.

The yacht slipped into overdrive, on the way back to Algol One and a girl named Betta.



"I can't tell you how much I enjoyed this."



There was a good reason why no space pilot in his right mind signed up for a Jovium flight; you were handed four trips, and each one was a—

SUICIDE RUN

by

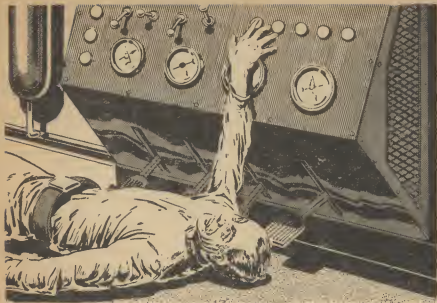
Mark Reinsberg

THE GRAVITY SHIELD was failing. Fip Largess knew that without looking at the control panel. The cabin lights grew dim. And his arm reaching

for the automatic pilot suddenly weighed sixty pounds.

"Oh God," he groaned, "not over Jupiter."

Death, he had once said in a tav-



ern with foolish bravado, is the same regardless of how it comes. But not here, not so far, far from the sun, not in swirling seas of methane, not in the dark, brutally cold maws of the fifth planet.

Four G's. His head toppled forward onto his chest like a hundred-pound boulder. The pressure shoved his guts out of place, bulged them against the wall of his belly, and his bladder let loose.

And he was strangling. He wanted to draw a breath, he was struggling to draw a breath, but the pressure on his lungs was enormous. His heartbeat staggered in his eardrums.

This was the crisis. This is what Freestone had meant. And how do you analyze the situation now? (This was not a question but a bitter reproach crossing Fip's mind like a meteor.) What's the answer? How are you superior to the scores of other men who've died here? Prove it now or forever - -

Largess was conscious but conscious only of losing consciousness. It was all a delirious muddle of present and past as the gravity hammered his brain to jelly.

And then like a voice in the earphones: "Alert! The Patrol is on your trail! Dump cargo!"

And then the shrill inner com-

mand, "Push the cargo release! Dump cargo."

★ ★ ★

AND THEN AFTER ALL the evidence was in and the counter-arguments had been made, Fip Largess arose to face the judge.

It was an old twenty-first century room, with the computer and defense and prosecution programmers on one side, the conventional jury box on the other side, and the re-enactment screen in the rear. The room was windowless and the ceiling smelled of freshly painted luminescence.

Martha pressed his hand reassuringly as he stood up. If she felt any twinges of shame for her husband, the billions of viewers on Earth and Mars could not readily find it in the loyal smile and ambiguous grey-eyed expression she projected at her man.

His face, however, was a pale mask of anxiety.

"Fip Largess," said the judge, "this court is ready to announce its findings. You have been accused of three separate offenses. One, the illegal possession of the drug Ubertasia. Two, the illegal transport of this same drug. And three, the illegal destruction of said drug.

"Specifically, you were apprehended while piloting a private ship within the twelve-thousand

mile limit of Earth. Prosecution contends that your ship carried an estimated one-million grams of Ubertasia which you obtained through an unlicensed source on Mars. Prosecution further contends that just before the customs patrol boarded your ship, you disposed of the entire cargo through your ship's reactor tubes, in an effort to destroy the evidence."

The judge paused, conscious of the drama in his words. Fip's eyes darted at the ten rows of live spectators. Their uniformly stern expressions bore a demand as readable as placards with the words: GUILTY, CONVICT HIM. The sternest expression, it seemed to Largess, was the one worn by his wife's own brother, Rodney Galt. It blazed with ill-concealed hatred for a brother-in-law who had brought disgrace on the family, and it read: GIVE HIM THE MAXIMUM.

"Largess," the judge resumed, "this crime has a very old and dishonorable label, that of smuggling. And the court finds you guilty on all three counts. Before I pass sentence on you, is there anything you wish to say?"

Fip drew himself erect to his full five-foot eleven stature. His slim, bony body trembled imperceptibly as he spoke.

"Yes, your honor, I would like

to say that I regard my actions as a service to humanity rather than a crime. We all know the properties of Ubertasia; we know that you have to use it if you want children. And I hope nobody's forgotten why you have to use it in this day and age."

The physical tremolo transferred from Fip's body to his voice. He caught sight of Martha's anguished warning, but his own emotional momentum was too great to be shunted.

"It's because of this damned nuclear economy of ours," he exploded. "Everything in the world run by atomic energy. It's flooded the planet with radioactivity. That's why two-thirds of the people are sterile . . ."

The judge's gavel began to pound.

"That's why they have to use it if they want children. And furthermore, who controls the supply? Who holds the monopoly? Who's created a false scarcity so that people could be kept in line? You know who - - this blessed government of ours!"

The bailiff and three guards converged on the prisoner.

"Everyone on Mars knows there's no real scarcity. So what if I made a little money giving people what they had every right to!"

A hand cracked down on the prisoner's mouth. When it was removed Largess remained silent, as a trickle of blood formed at one corner of his mouth.

Court atmosphere was upset. The judge struggled to regain his judicial calm. "This is neither the time nor place for a political harangue, Mr. Largess. The people of Earth, who have continued faith in our government's Equal Distribution Act, want to see justice done in this case.

"You are sentenced to exile from Earth for a period of ten years. Your pilot's license is hereby revoked. And you are fined the sum of ten thousand solars."

The exile, Fip thought, will be harder on Martha than me. As for the license, nobody cares about that in frontier country. But the money.

"Your honor, I don't have that amount of money. I don't have that amount of money."

"Very well. Colonial servitude for a period of seven years on Venus. Is that your preference?"

Largess saw his wife walk with swift, fluttering steps to the spectator's section where her brother sat. He saw Rodney Galt shake his head, with a pursed-lip expression; he saw Martha's hands move imploringly. Then, later, the worst part of Fip's sentence, a humilia-

tion the judge could not have devised more perfectly.

"I'll pay your fine, Largess." Galt bit off his words harshly. "I'll pay it for Martha's sake. But you know what I think of you, Largess."

★ ★ ★

LARGESS DREW A BREATH.

His chest, his ribs, his shoulders felt crushed like a miner buried in a landslide. He lay on the harsh, uncushioned deck of the cabin. Blood and fevered consciousness flowed back into his brain.

"Ship," he thought frantically. "What's happening? Up or down?"

He rolled his head on the deck so that he could view the control panel. His left ear was smashed flat by the weight. It seemed for a moment that his neck would twist apart. But at last his eyes, burning in their sockets like molten lead, focused on the panel.

"Ascending at about thirty feet a second. Descending at about thirty feet a second." Fip closed his eyelids with immense effort.

"Oh Lord, we'll crash."

And Largess lay on the deck and imagined how the end would come. The ship would hang in mid-air. No, there was no sense calling it mid-air, that stream of bromines and flourines whipping around the surface at nine-hun-

dred miles an hour that we call Jupiter's atmosphere. The ship would hang there in mid-stream, a few meters above the surface, until a solid mass of something - - rocklike - - came crashing against the hull.

Or sheer friction alone would do the trick in a few hours. Or a downdraft, that the automatic couldn't correct for. There were lots of ways. Because machines were stupid. They can't think. All they can do is do what they're told. When something new comes up they're helpless. And they can't fight. They don't know how to battle a planet that's out to get you. Only man can . . .

Largess sobbed, "Oh Christ, if I could only get at those controls!"

And then for the first time he made an effort to think: What has happened? How did it happen?

★ ★ ★

"IT'S A COMBINATION of many things," he told Martha. "First of all, it's the Depression. There just aren't any jobs opening up. And all those millions of unemployed. Of which I'm just one."

"With this one big difference," said his wife quietly. "They're all drawing unemployment benefits. And we can't."

Fip turned his back on her. He faced the single picture window looking out across the ruddy des-

ert landscape, marked by a scattering of semi-sphere hermetic huts similar to their own.

"Are you throwing that up to me again?" he said wearily.

Martha went to him and put her arm around his shoulders. "Oh darling, no, no, no, I'm not bringing that up. I didn't mean that. It's just that our situation is so desperate, and we have no resources."

She slid in front of him without removing her arms. "And you're such an expert pilot and astro-gator and transport man. Surely there must be a lot of companies that can use you? Don't you think?"

Martha had been a very beautiful girl when they first married. Her hair was long and brown and free-flowing, not cut wig-fashion like so many of the women who expected to lose their hair because of radiation. Martha had never lost her hair, but the prematurely white stands predominated; she refused to dye her hair. And the attrition of their exile from Earth - - synthetic foods, wrong gravity, lack of natural sunshine, isolation, poverty - - had worn away at her features, giving them an excessively fragile pallor which her husband found heartbreakingly sad.

"You know what kind of a reputation I have now. That's really the hardest thing I have to buck.

I don't think I'll ever be able to find a legitimate job again."

Martha began to sob. "Oh, Fip. What'll we do?"

She pressed her body against his for comfort, and a new sense of urgency and despair filled Largess as he felt the firm, unyielding bulge at her waist, and thought of the child that would be born to them in two more months.

"I can only see three alternatives," Largess said in a flat mechanical voice, stripped of hope. "I can go back to my old line - -"

"Never do that," Martha said with fright in her eyes.

"I know you wouldn't want me to but at least we can make some good money."

"Never do that. You'll be caught again. I'd never see you again in my whole life I couldn't bear that."

Largess caressed her long hair "We'll rule that one out. But darling, you have to see this situation as it is. I've tried for seven months to line something up, something legitimate. I'm licked. I don't know where our next solar's coming from."

"Well, what are the other alternatives? To sell yourself into voluntary indenture? I'd never agree to that!" Martha went to the supply cabinet and took out a food packet and began opening it with agitat-

ed, fumbling gestures.

"I could get enough to send you back to Earth."

"I don't want to be separated from you."

"You would have enough to get you through the next year or so. You'd be able to find a job, maybe find some other guy. Make a fresh start of your life."

"You would need my written consent for colonial indenture and I'd never give it. Believe me, Fip, I never would. Here, sit down and eat."

"Aren't you going to eat something with me?"

"I'm not hungry; I just ate something."

Largess seized his wife in a frenzy. "Liar!"

"What's the third alternative, Fip? You said there were three."

"I hate this one worse than the other two, by far." His eyes flicked at Deimos rising over the horizon. "I'll go to your brother. I'll go to Ganymede and ask him for a job."

Hope sprang into his wife's face. "Oh, but that's a wonderful idea! I've wanted to suggest it a hundred times in the past month."

"You realize how much he hates me, Martha. He'll probably turn me down flat."

"No he won't. He'll see that you get a good job with Jovium Trans-

port. I'm sure of it." Martha hesitated. "Only promise me one thing."

"What's that?"

"Oh, it's silly even to think of it. Rodney would never suggest it and you'd never take it. I mean, you know, the Jupiter run."

★ ★ ★

WHAT HAPPENED? That was simple. The gravity shield failed and suddenly he weighed four times as he did on Earth. And there he lay, flat on his back with eight or ten broken ribs, and the salt taste of blood in his mouth, and each breath like a blow torch in his lungs.

And Jupiter waiting impatiently to swallow him up.

How did it happen? Well, Freestone had warned him to be careful on the takeoff. You couldn't accelerate too fast or the cargo would blow. So you had to start up slow, no faster than a freight elevator. And that took power, maximum power, all the power that the ship's reactor could deliver. Because you have to use all the directional rockets at once. You have to blast in every direction to hold the ship steady: lateral, dorsal, ventral. You have to lock your boat in the sky; with the faintest, almost imperceptible plurality of thrust going to your ventrals. And

your ship eases upward.

But that takes all the power you have got when Jupiter's involved. And what's left for the shield? Nothing. And after all, a gravity shield needs almost a quarter of the reactor's output. You don't erect a halo of energy outside your hull and scramble the basic cohesive force of the universe with a few spare atoms, you know.

"Well, then, let's give the shield what it needs. Let's divert energy from the rockets—just enough to cancel Jupiter's gravity."

A flush of excitement went through his mind, then cooled.

"If I jolt the cargo, if I accelerate or decelerate too fast, I'm finished. If I cut the rockets evenly, then I'm right where I started before takeoff: on the surface of Jupiter.

"But at least I'll get rid of the gravity. I'll be able to think. I'll be able to move."

Largess made an effort to move, to slide his body towards the manual controls. The pressure made it impossible. He was in agony. His belly muscles constricted in a sob, and his voice sounded in a tiny, scratching whine.

"It's killing me."

★ ★ ★

RODNEY GALT LOOKED at the visitor's screen, which had just buzzed, and hated what

he saw. His first impulse was to be "not in" to his brother-in-law. Then he realized that this was impractical. Only last week Galt had released his own receptionist in a new economy wave demanded by the home office.

Galt flicked on the two-way and said, "Largess, I don't want to see you."

"Give me a minute, Galt. It's urgent."

"I've no more money to give you, if that's what you want."

"It's not money; it's not a loan I want. Please, this affects Martha as much as it does me."

Galt scowled into the screen. "You bastard. You know how to hit where it hurts." He pressed a button and the office door swung open.

"I warn you," he said, starting a recording machine at his desk, "that I'm making a record of this conversation. You'd better not try to blackmail me through my sister. Do you understand?"

Largess stood in a gaunt, despairingly relaxed posture just inside the doorway, his face screwed incredulously.

"Look, Galt, it's pretty damn hard for me to come to you and ask you for any favors, but I'm a man with a gun in my back. I need a job."

Galt sat motionless for a few

seconds, then tilted his chair back and began to laugh. It was a forced, artificial laugh. Abruptly he stopped. He saw that a signal button, one of twenty mounted in rows on a wall mural of the planet Jupiter, had flared into life, a bright ruby jewel of light.

His manner changed. He stared listlessly for a moment at the button, then returned his gaze to Largess.

"We haven't any jobs open at the present time. And if we had, I don't think I could recommend you to any of our departments."

"Yes, yes, I know. My criminal record. But Galt, you have to help me. I'm trying to stay legitimate, but all the doors are closed to me. I can't find work. We're facing . . . I don't know what . . . starvation, servitude. Galt, you don't know how tough it's been on Mars."

"I can't do anything for you."

"My wife is expecting a child."

"On smuggled Ubertasia?"

Largess stood silent and stunned. "That's a low blow, Galt."

Rodney Galt wanted to recall the words, wanted them unsaid. He pressed his teeth against his tongue. "Look," he said finally, "I can let you have a few hundred."

"I don't want a loan. I want a job. A legitimate job."

"Damn it, Largess, this is a depression. There aren't any jobs. Even if I wanted to help you, I couldn't. We're running in the red. We've had to let half of our office staff go. We've had to close down our refinery on Callish. Where do you think I'm going to find you a job?"

"Piloting."

"Don't be silly. Your license was revoked."

"So I can't touch down on Earth. What difference does that make out here?"

Galt drummed his fingers uneasily. "What are you driving at?"

"I want the Jovium run." For the first time Largess stared levelly at his brother-in-law.

Galt stood up brusquely. "Out of the question."

Largess leaned across his desk.

"Don't tell me you've had to shut down that part of the business, because I know different. Earth is buying every ounce of Jovium you can produce. They're crying for it; they've got to have it. It's the only hundred per cent radiation insulator, and they're paying a fantastic premium. I want the Jovium run."

Galt shook his head. "That run is absolute suicide. One out of every two trips is fatal."

"I know that. I know that. But you're paying your pilots fifteen

hundred a trip. I need that money."

"You fool. You stupid fool. Go back to smuggling. You'll find the odds are much better. Didn't you see that red light flash on a minute ago? See it on the wall there?" Galt strode over to the wall and touched the light. "Know what it means? That button tells me that another transport just blew up on the surface of Jupiter. And along with it went another wise guy just like you who thought he could beat the odds."

"I'll take the chance. One trip is all I need."

"That's what they all say," Galt said with a bitter smile. "But you see, the company doesn't hire for one trip. You sign up for four trips or none at all. And you make one right after the other. And let me repeat, we average one blow-up for every two trips."

"That part doesn't interest me. How many trips are you allowed to make in one day?"

Galt smiled as at a child's foolishness. "The company doesn't care. All four, if you're physically able."

"And what do you give the guy who makes four trips?"

"Bonus of five thousand. Eleven thousand altogether."

"All right," said Largess loudly, "sign me up. All I ask is one thing. I want you to keep all the

other men out of my way. I'll be busy and I don't want to worry about traffic lanes."

"That's hardly necessary, Largess. Right at the moment, there are no other pilots."

Largess swallowed hard. "All right," he repeated. "Sign me up."

Galt looked abashed. His manner softened. "No, Largess, you don't know what you're asking for. I'd hate to tell you how few men have actually made four trips."

"How many?"

"Two. One is in a hospital on Earth—permanent invalid."

"The other?"

"Here on Ganymede somewhere."

"Then it can be done."

"I couldn't sign you up for a thing like this; I'll be ..."

"Murdering your sister's husband?" Largess supplied. "Well, you would like to see me out of the way, wouldn't you? Admit it."

"Not this way. I hate your guts, but this is something else again."

"How about survivor's benefits? I don't suppose there's any insurance on this game."

"The widow gets whatever the pilot would have earned," Galt said grimly.

"Fine," said Largess, "then no one can lose, can they? Get out the contract and stop this sentimental sham."

★ ★ ★

THE FREE FALL tavern was located on the outermost ring of Ganymede City, near the secondary airlock. The contoured bar stood in front of the rear wall, which was actually not a wall but the shell of the city's transparent dome. Through the entire artificial twenty-four hour day, some portion of Jupiter was visible at the bar. Occasionally, the entire mother planet, a beautifully tinted aqua globe with green, brown, yellow and gray horizontal stripes filled the sky like a delicate oriental screen. Four other moons of Jupiter's twelve were visible playing about like shy fire-flies in an ever-changing hide-and-seek.

Appropriately, the Free Fall tavern operated by special license on one-half Earth gravity.

"I admire your view," said Largess to the proprietor. "It's the kind of thing you can stare at by the hour."

The man behind the bar grunted. It was months since he had heard an original comment on Jupiter.

"It seems to change constantly. The color is never quite the same from one minute to the next. Any idea why?"

"Most customers find it interesting. What'll you have?"

"A few straightforward answers," said Largess, deciding to drop the

casual approach. "Tomorrow I have to go down to that monstrosity."

"Worse luck for you," said the proprietor, drawing away to busy himself with glass polishing.

"I need your help. You're Freestone, aren't you. Please. You're the only man who can help me."

"I'm Freestone."

Largess offered his hand but Freestone dug both gloved hands into his jacket.

"You made four trips on the Jovium run."

"Galt talks too much."

"I'm going down tomorrow. What is there I have to know?"

"They gave you the summary of all the other pilots' experience, didn't they?"

"Yes, but it doesn't add up to anything. Ninety-nine per cent got themselves killed. You're part of the remaining one per cent. Tell me, how did you survive four trips?"

Freestone leaned across the bar, speaking softly. "Others have asked me that question. Others just like you, lads getting ready for the trip they think will make them their fortune. Solve all their financial problems." He looked far away at Jupiter. "Well, in a way it does."

"What's the secret?"

"There is no secret. I've told

the same thing to the others that I'm about to tell you now. It's a blow-up one way or gravity death the other. You just have to strike a happy medium."

"What instrument readings did you have? You can certainly tell me that."

"It's never the same. Each trip was different."

Largess flared angrily. "You mean, you were the only one smart enough to work it out. You figured it out and you let all the others die their own way. You—"

"No." Freestone suddenly leaped over the bar. Half gravity.

He was a small man, almost a dwarf. Even at that he seemed to be wearing metal stilts. With a quick, dramatic gesture he removed his jacket. Metal rods extended from each shoulder. "You see, mister, I was the only person who tried it without his own arms and legs. The third and fourth time, that is."

★ ★ ★

RODNEY GALT WAS on hand the next morning to see him off. "You are going to your death. I don't suppose I can harbor this grievance any longer."

"You know, some day some man is going to dope this out," Largess said with a carefree shrug.

Jupiter grew as Largess took off. It was no longer a giant wheel

in space; it was all of space, and it was down. The ship descended on automatic, into a whirlpool of energy and matter. Largess switched on the radio, but only briefly. The clamor of outraged electrons, roared through the loudspeaker in a voice that forbade any communication with Ganymede.

There was no special place to land. ("Indeed," thought Largess, "there is no such thing as land.") He hovered his ship a few meters above the seething liquid surface, locking vertical position. He opened the cargo hold occupying the reserve fuel tanks and released the two carbon terminals. These descended below the surface and the electrolysis began.

Simple process, he thought, fully automatic. Jovium is a liquid at Jupiter pressure and temperature. We syphon it up.

The cargo meter registered full. Largess retracted the terminals, closed the hold.

"Now up we go, slowly." He blasted away with all rockets, and the ship climbed slowly.

The gravity shield began to fail. Four G's. He lay crushed to the deck.

It seemed that he was losing consciousness a second time. Gravity death. He recognized the symptoms. It seemed to him that his downfall had begun not here but

elsewhere, with an earphoned warning: *Alert! The Patrol is on your trail! Dump cargo!*

Hectic life jumbled his thoughts.

"Ubertasia! They'll never catch me with it in my ship! Out with it through the tubes!"

He pressed the jettison button.

Out into space it went; out went the incriminating evidence.

But that was then, not now. Now he was on the deck, and he weighed as much as the Earth itself. But Largess could see the cargo jettison half an arm's length away.

If he could reach it. If he could dump the cargo. He tried to slide forward, but the weight was too much for his breast stroke motion of arms and legs. Then he discovered he could roll. He smashed his nose and other ear to pulp before his body halted against the instrument panel.

Then he cried in renewed chagrin. All rockets were blasting. He could not open the cargo jettison.

In his despair he had another thought. In his smuggling days, when he dumped cargo, it was an open door proposition. That left the goods floating around intact in space - - evidence that could be picked up by the authorities.

Through the rockets, then. What might happen? A blow-up? Death was far more certain as matters

stood. If, on the other hand, he could get rid of the volatile cargo, he could cut the lateral and dorsal rockets and the gravity shield could again function. And without Jovium to worry about, he could accelerate normally. So he'd land on Ganymede without cargo - - a failure. At least he'd be alive.

Rodney Galt's eyes could not remain fixed on the paperwork. His gaze kept stealing from his desk to the panel of red lights superimposed on the Jupiter mural, the lights that meant life or death on the Jovium run.

When the desk phone buzzed, a tremor went through him. He picked up the receiver without taking his eyes from the mural.

"Mars collect?" he repeated dumbly after the operator. He frowned in puzzlement. Who could that be? Certainly not a business call. Then his jaw set grimly. "All right, operator. I'll accept the call."

"Rod?" It was Martha's anxious voice, on recording. "Has Fip been in to see you? He left here a week ago. He was going to see you about a job. Promised to let me know right away, but I haven't heard from him. Rod, were you able to help him?"

Galt rubbed his forehead in anguish. How could he answer his sister? 'Yes, dear, he was in and I

sent him to his death.' He sat at his desk in mute torment.

"Have you a reply, sir?" said the operator. "Your message will take thirty-one minutes to reach Mars."

Galt decided. He would tell Martha the truth, but not the whole truth. The truth, as of now. And by the time his voice reached Mars . . . ?

"Wonderful to hear from you, Martha! Yes, your husband was here and we signed him up at a very good salary. I am sending you an advance on his first paycheck. Fip is out on the job now. I imagine that's why you haven't heard from him."

(Or ever will, he mentally concluded.)

★ ★ ★

WITH INFINITE AGONY, infinite exertion, he drew his hand up to the control panel. Heavy in his imagination as a railroad tie or a steel girder, his finger stubbed against the reserve fuel button.

He was not out of pain; his ribs were still cracked. His ears and nose were still mashed horribly. But the pressure was gone. The gravity shield was again functioning. As Largess staggered to the pilot seat, the dials, meters and gauges told him an incredible story.

All rockets were still blasting

away, but amazingly, they were using only half the reactor potential.

It was the Jovium that made the difference. Not only an insulator of reactors, but a newly discovered power source flowed through the blazing rocket tubes.

The ship was ascending.

Largess seized the manual controls, prepared to accelerate. "I'd better not take the chance," he thought grimly. "There's still plenty of Jovium left in the tanks."

When he had gained a height of a thousand miles, the slow way, he stopped jettisoning cargo.

He would land on Ganymede with a third of a tank of Jovium. He could excuse that on the grounds of inexperience in loading.

Abruptly, Fip Largess saw the possibilities. A safe, low-risk technique of hauling Jovium. An abundance of Jovium for Earth's reactors. An end to escaped radiation. And end to sterility from radiation.

Largess was dazzled by the vision. Then the picture clouded over slightly. "Wait a minute. I'd better not tell Galt right away. Not if I want my four-trip bonus. Why should the company pay a premium when there's no more risk?"

The domed city of Ganymede loomed below. He circled for a landing.

THE END

It would take more than two decades to reach Sirius. For the long voyage everyone on board was put to sleep. Everyone except the —

Starship Saboteur

by

Bob Silverberg

THE STARSHIP ALTAIR moved quietly through the dark night of space, nudging forward across the light-years between Earth and Sirius.

In the Suspension Hold on the ship's fourth level, Rex Holden stirred uneasily in his fluid bath, stretched and murmured in his sleep. Like the other eighty-five men and women aboard, Holden had slept for nearly ten years while the *Altair* travelled. The journey to Sirius - - eight light years - - took a starship twenty-five Terran years. The trip was not yet at midpoint.

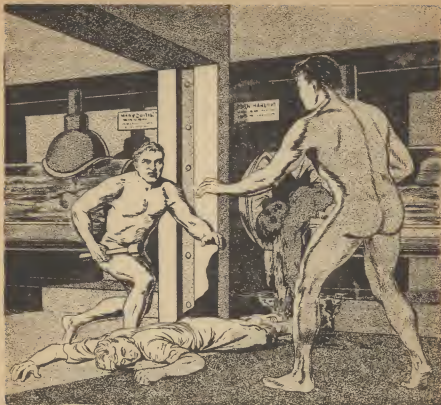
Inside Rex Holden's animation-chamber, a shining needle flickered momentarily, then plunged downward into Holden's chest.

Adrenalin coursed into the still-ed aorta of Holden's heart. Dimly, he sensed that something was happening to him - - and then the

cover of his chamber slid off and he sat up, coming slowly to full awareness.

He knew what had happened. It was his turn to serve as watchman over the slumberers. Each member of the expedition spent four months of the journey awake, according to a predetermined schedule. The cybernetic controllers of the Suspension Hold governed the rotation; the newly-awakened watchman was supposed to find his predecessor and tell him to return to sleep for the rest of the voyage.

Holden stretched lazily and shook his head to clear away the fog of a decade-long slumber. It was hard, at first, to readjust to normal life after so many years of complete suspension of animation. It took time for unused arteries to begin carrying blood again, for long-rested synapses to



function and neurons to react.
It - -

Holden heard the sudden startling sound of breaking glass at the far end of the Suspension Hold. The sound echoed in the silent ship for a moment, ringing violently in Holden's ears. He winced at the pain of noise in ears long used to silence.

Squinting to see at such a great distance, he peered down toward

the far end of the Suspension Hold. And then, not bothering to put on the robe that hung near his chamber, he began to run.

"Holden! What are you - - "

It was Jair Leslie, another member of the expedition - - a squat, balding man whom Holden had come to dislike during the long sessions of pre-voyage indoctrination. He, too, had just awakened. He was naked, and his eyes

blinked uncertainly as he stared at Holden.

"What's been going on here, Leslie?" Holden gestured at the scene around him. A figure lay face-down on the deck, blood trickling out from his gray-haired scalp. And an animation chamber had been broken open, and the already-darkening corpse of an expedition member was visible behind the shattered glass.

Gray hair? That could only be Dard Ronholm, the ship's captain and supposedly Holden's predecessor as watchman. He was the only man aboard ship with gray hair - - and he was wearing a tunic, which indicated that he'd been awake for some time.

"I just woke," Jair Leslie said. "I found Ronholm here busy breaking open poor Davis' chamber. Davis is dead, but I managed to lay Ronholm out before he could kill the rest of us."

"How come you're awake?" Leslie asked, puzzled.

"I'm the new watchman. I was just about to ask *you* the same question, Holden."

"*You're* the new watchman? But - - "

"Don't believe him, Holden!" The weak voice was that of Captain Ronholm. The old man rolled over and sat up, wiping blood from his battered forehead. "You're the watchman, Holden - -

my successor. Somehow Leslie woke up also, and I found him killing Davis. He hit me and - - "

"*Quiet!*" Leslie snapped. "It's a lie, you old fool! You're the one who opened that chamber!"

"I'm inclined to doubt that," Holden said quietly. "It's Captain Ronholm's word against yours, and your story doesn't stack up. If he wanted to kill us all, why did he wait until the day the new watchman was supposed to awaken? He had four months to do it undetected. He - - "

"He went psycho waiting," Leslie said. "The old man's out of his mind! Can't you see that?"

"No," Holden said. He turned away and started walking toward a booth in the center of the Suspension Hold.

"Where are you going?" Leslie asked. His half-shout echoed weirdly in the giant room.

"I'm going to wake the entire ship. We'll have to put this matter to a trial, Leslie."

He reached for the lever that would awaken all eighty-two sleepers.

"**G**ET AWAY FROM THERE, Holden," Jair Leslie said menacingly. "Don't pull that thing."

"Why not?"

"Because I say so!" And Leslie

sprang.

His thick, long-armed body smashed into Holden, knocking him away from the lever. In self-defense, Holden brought his knotted hands down on Leslie's balding head, jarring the smaller man. Leslie shook off the blow and smashed a fist into Holden's stomach. While Holden fought to recover his wind, Leslie grabbed him by one arm and swung him away from the lever, out toward the middle of the deck.

There, Holden broke loose and stepped back.

"I don't know what your game is, Leslie, but you won't get away with it."

Leslie chuckled. "You can't stop me, Holden. No one can! If I can fool the cybe machines, I can beat you and all the rest of these idiots." He spat scornfully and circled Holden, ready to resume the fight.

Holden edged forward and landed a solid right, but Leslie countered by clubbing down on the back of Holden's neck with the side of his fist. Holden staggered dizzily and tried to recover his balance, but his reflexes were still poor and he slipped to the ground. He waited for Leslie to administer the knockout blow, but to his surprise it never came. There was only the sound of laughter and bare feet running over the deck.

"Come back here!" Holden yelled.

Leslie laughed derisively. "Come find me," he called, and vanished into the dim recesses of the giant starship's upper levels. Holden leaned against the wall for a few seconds, recovering his strength.

That was like Leslie, all right - - to kill a sleeping man, club down the old captain, then run away as soon as he got into an evenly-matched fight. Holden stared bitterly at the doorway through which the saboteur had vanished. Then he heard a groan from behind him, and remembered the fallen form of old Captain Ronholm.

Ronholm's scalp was still bleeding, and he was barely conscious. Holden knelt and examined him. He was no medic, but it wasn't hard to tell that the old captain's skull was fractured. Nearby lay the length of metal pipe with which Leslie had struck down the old man and opened the animation chamber of the dead crewman.

"Did he get away?" Ronholm murmured.

"He ran like a scared rat," said Holden. "He had me beaten, but he was too yellow to stop and look. As soon as he knocked me down, he ran."

"Where is he?"

"Somewhere in the upper levels. We'll hunt him down as soon as

you're taken care of."

"Forget about me," Ronholm said. "I won't last long. Get him before he can do any damage to the ship." The old man sighed. "I suspected him all along, but I couldn't prove it. I knew - -"

Suddenly Ronholm's eyes closed. Holden touched the old captain lightly on the shoulder, then shook his head. Ronholm was dead. That made two victims of Leslie's villainy already.

Ronholm had suspected him? Of what? And how had Leslie managed to awaken? The cybe controllers were pre-set to awaken only one crewman at a time - - yet they had awakened both Leslie and Holden. Why?

And where was Leslie now? What evil was he planning?

Holden shook his head slowly and looked down at the body of the dead captain. This was too big a thing for him to handle alone. He walked back to the control booth in the center of the Suspension Hold and, after a moment's hesitation, pulled the switch that would bring the entire crew of the *Altair* to life.

Slowly, reluctantly, the crew of the *Altair* began to awaken.

Holden watched as eighty-two animation chambers rolled open in response to the servo-mechanism he had activated; eighty-two hypodermics of adrenalin plunged

into eighty-two hearts, and eighty-two naked men and women climbed bewilderedly from the womb-like security of their animation chambers into the uncertainty that faced them.

"Where's the watchman?" someone asked.

"Why were we awakened?"

"Did something happen to the ship?"

Holden cupped his hands and shouted, "I'm the watchman! Listen to me!"

The members of the crew, still dazed and not fully awake, gathered slowly around him. Holden told them what had happened - - how he had discovered Leslie in the act of breaking open an animation chamber, of their struggle, of the deaths of Davis and Captain Ronholm.

"As watchman, I'm in charge," Holden said. "And since the captain's dead, I'll remain in charge. I've awakened all of you because it's necessary to track down this madman before he can do serious damage to the ship."

"How far out are we?" someone asked.

"Ten years. Not quite half-way."

"And just how did Leslie and you both awaken?" asked a cybernetics technician. "The cybe controllers are set to wake one watchman at a time."

"I know," Holden said. "But

he said something about having fooled the cybes. I suspect he tampered with them before take-off, arranged to be awakened out of turn once we were a good distance from Earth. It was just his bad luck that he picked the day I was set to wake and become watchman."

He gestured toward the two bodies at the far end of the Suspension Hold. "Time's wasting," he said. "Kennedy, Lawrence, and Bronston, and Stein, come with me and we'll give the Captain and Davis space burial. And as for the rest of you - -" he pointed to Henry Larsen, assistant navigator - - "Hank, divide them up into search-parties and start fine-combing this ship. We've *got* to find Leslie - - right away!"

THE BODIES OF DAVIS and Ronholm were committed to space in a short, efficient ceremony. Holden turned to the four men who had assisted him, after the airlock was closed on the two bodies.

"That's that," he said. "Let's go find Larsen and get assignments for the searching parties."

"Why do you think Leslie did what he did?" asked Kennedy, the cybernetics technician. "Just psycho?"

"I don't know," replied Holden. "Captain Ronholm said something

about *suspecting* him - - as if Leslie had been planning to do something all along."

"The Captain didn't tell you anything else?"

Holden shook his head. "He started to, but he died before he could get it out." They re-entered the Suspension Hold, where two men and a woman stood guard.

"Any word about Leslie?" Holden asked.

"The last we heard, Larsen had blanketed the ship without finding him," said the girl. She was Judy Foster, a biologist. Holden had dated her two or three times during pre-indoctrination, and he felt oddly relieved that she had remained here on guard instead of going with the searching parties. There was no telling what Leslie might do or where he could be found.

Holden reached for the ship's intercom. "Larsen?" he said. "Hank, this is Holden."

"Hello, Rex," came the reply after a few moments. "No, we haven't found him yet. I've got twenty people on each level, going through the ship systematically. There's no sign of Leslie. None at all."

Holden frowned. "Okay," he said. "Keep looking, I guess."

"You don't think he went completely psycho and jumped out the airlock, do you?"

"It isn't much like him," Holden said. "Keep looking, Hank." "Right."

Holden put down the intercom and looked around the Hold. There were still too many unanswered questions, he thought. He didn't have enough information to act on.

Judy Foster walked over to him. "You looked puzzled, Rex. What's on your mind?"

"This whole business. I have the feeling I only know a fraction of the story. If only Captain Ronholm were - -"

"He's dead now," Judy Foster reminded him.

"I know."

Then Kennedy got an idea. "Hey, Rex! I just remembered - - there's a top-secret section in the information banks of the cybe controllers, for use only in emergency. Maybe there's something in there you ought to know."

"Maybe there is," Holden said. "Take me there, will you?"

THE CYBERNETIC Controllers of the ship occupied one enormous room on the Second Level. Holden stood in the middle of the room, feeling dwarfed by the immensity of the mechanical mind all around. Computers hummed and sang as they governed the motion of the ship, the balance of the atmosphere, the billion

other details.

"Okay," Holden said. "Find me this classified info, will you?"

The cybe technician's fingers played over the console of the information banks. "Want it on vocal?"

Holden nodded.

"The following information is for use of the captain of this ship only, or, in the event of his death or incapacitation, his duly qualified successor."

"I am the acting captain," Holden told the giant brain.

Scanners clicked as the information was digested. Then: *"Approved."*

"Okay," Holden said to Kennedy. "Feed me the whole Classified Info bank."

"Coming up," the technician said.

The controller proceeded to disgorge a vast supply of information obviously intended for the captain's ears alone - - information about managing the ship, handling the landing, controlling the crew members after the colony on Sirius was established. He noted it all carefully; now that Ronholm was dead, he would have to engrave these things on his mind. But he still wasn't getting the information he wanted.

Finally: *"The Captain should also be aware of the existence and possible presence aboard his*

ship of members of an underground organization dedicated to the proposition that man must not colonize other worlds. Although this organization is known to exist, its leaders have not yet been apprehended, and in the interest of world security all information about it has been kept from the public. The members of your own crew will not be aware of the existence of this group, nor should they be told of it.

"The - -"

Suddenly, the intercom beeped.

"Okay, shut it off," Holden said. "Dammit, that's what we needed to know!" He grabbed for the intercom.

Hank Larsen's voice said. "Rex, we've just received word from Leslie."

"Where is he?"

"He's holed up in the drive unit, with the entrances completely sealed off. He orders us to turn the ship back toward Earth and return to sleep or he'll wreck the drive."

"Tell him we're considering his order," Holden said. He glanced at the waiting cybernetic technician. "They've found Leslie," he said. "He's a member of that secret group, all right."

"What do we do now?"

"I'm not sure," Holden said. "But I've got a sort of an idea that may work."

THE ENTIRE CREW was assembled in the Suspension Hold when Holden and Kennedy returned.

Larsen came up to him. "I didn't see any point in continuing the search, so I called everyone back here."

"Okay, Hank. Good work, even if you couldn't rout him out."

"How are we going to find him now?"

"Are we going to turn back?" someone else asked. "If we go to sleep, he'll only kill us all anyway!"

Holden nodded. "It's a tight situation. Leslie's a fanatic - - a member of a secret group so hush-hush that not even we're supposed to know about it, for fear it'll give space colonization a black eye. I just got the word from the info banks."

"What's this?" Larsen asked.

"An underground movement designed to blot out the star colonies," Holden said. "They work their way on board starships and gimmick the cybes so they'll wake up in mid-voyage. Then they just go down the row of chambers, killing everyone. Very efficient and very insane. It was just luck that Leslie timed his awakening badly."

"So now he's changed plans and is going to wreck the drive instead," Larsen said. "We're just as bad off as if he'd broken open our chambers."

"No we're not," said Holden. "We're still alive, as of now. And I think we can still flush him out of there."

"How?"

Holden ignored the question. "I want a radio operator," he said. "I've got a subspace call to make."

Two hours later, Holden stood outside the massive duralloy doors of the drive unit. They were closed, tight closed, so that even a microbe would have trouble getting through. They couldn't be opened from the outside at all. And they were built securely, to shield the ship from radiation in the event of a pile blowup.

Right now, Jair Leslie was crouching somewhere behind those doors, waiting for the answer to his ultimatum. He had given the *Altair* crew three hours to return to their chambers and re-enter suspended animation. Two of those hours remained.

Sweat poured down Holden's face. He lifted the hand mike to his lips and said, "Leslie? Leslie, can you hear me?"

"I can hear you all right, Holden. You have an answer for me yet?"

"Let me in, Leslie! Open the doors!"

Leslie chuckled savagely. "You really must think I'm crazy, Holden. I'm not opening these doors until you're all safely back in

dreamland."

"You'd better open up," Holden said. He paused, then added, "*Sunflower!*"

"What?" Leslie's tones reflected utter astonishment.

"You heard me. *Sunflower*. Do I have to say more?"

"Who are you?" Leslie asked.

"How much identification do I need?"

"But - - but - - you, Holden?"

"Me. There are two of us aboard this ship." Holden chuckled. "We're so damned secret we fool each other. Only I've got orders that countermand yours. This ship is supposed to get through to Sirius - - and we destroy it there!"

"How can I trust you, Holden?" Leslie asked, suddenly suspicious.

"Look here," Holden said impatiently. "I've already given adequate identification. But suppose I add that the name of our leader is Jak Henrix, and that the headquarters are in a tunnel under Chicago, and that - -"

"All right," said Leslie. "It's incredible, but I'll have to accept that. No outsider could possibly know what you've just told me."

There was the sound of relays turning over, and then the ponderous doors swung open. Holden stepped in.

Leslie was sitting against a pylon, arms folded, holding the microphone.

"*Sunflower*," Holden said.

"*Zeus*," Leslie responded. He got up and crossed the floor toward Holden, smiling. "It's hard to believe that you're one of us, Rex. But - -"

And then Holden hit him.

His fist ripped into Leslie's jaw, snapping his head back. Holden saw the look of open-faced astonishment on Leslie's face, the accusation of betrayal. Following up his advantage, Holden smashed Leslie to his knees with a right cross, then caught him by the throat, lifted him up, and hit him again. Leslie murmured something indistinctly and started to sag. Holden hit him again, just once, and the fanatic stretched out full length on the floor.

HOLDEN REACHED for the intercom. "All right, Hank - - bring a couple of men and come on in."

A few moments later, Larsen, Judy Foster, Kennedy, and two or three other crewmen entered. "There he is," Holden said. "Take him upstairs and put him in a deep freeze -- and make sure there's no way he'll be able to get out of his chamber until we reach Sirius. We can figure out a punishment for him then."

"But - - how did you get him to open up?" Larsen asked wonderingly.

Holden smiled. "The essential nature of a top-secret conspiracy is one that involves passwords - - and when it's as top-secret as this one, you've got to trust anyone with the right password implicitly, or else not trust anyone. So I threw some key information at Leslie, and he let me in."

"I don't understand," Judy Foster said. "Where'd you get the password? Are *you* - -"

"A member of the conspiracy? Hardly," Holden said. "But you have to remember that it's *ten years* since we left Earth, even if it only seems like a few hours for most of you. Leslie's little gang of conspirators couldn't stay secret forever. I called Earth via sub-radio, and they told me what I wanted to hear. The conspiracy was smashed four years ago. Someone high-up spilled the beans."

"And they gave you all the information you needed," Judy said.

Holden nodded. "Passwords, leaders, all of it. Leslie swallowed it faithfully."

Larsen returned. "He's in deep freeze, Rex. Pickled well enough to stay under till we hit Sirius, at least."

"Good. And now, I suggest you and the others get back to sleep. There's fifteen years before we hit Sirius, you know."

Larsen said, "I'll spread the word."

"Oh -- one other thing." Holden added. He turned to Kennedy. "I'd like you to recompute the cybe controller's schedule for the watchmen. For the rest of the voyage, I think it's best if we have *two* crewmen awake at all times, instead of one."

"I'll do that right away," Kennedy said.

Holden pointed to Judy Foster. "And -- as acting captain -- I'm appointing Miss Foster as my co-watchman. Is that all right with you, Judy?" This was as good a time as any to get to know her, he thought

She smiled. "I was just about to volunteer," she said.

THE END

★ *Jets Against Missiles!* ★

IT has recently been pointed out that there is a certain futility in attempting to knock down the high-altitude bombers of the Strategic Air Command with ordinary jet fighters. Not only do the bombers fly too high, but they are more maneuverable!

This may seem contradictory, but it is true. It takes a jet fighter six or seven minutes to climb to fifty or sixty thousand feet, and when it gets to that altitude, not only is there merely enough fuel left for a single pass at the bomber, but the small wing surfaces do not permit the fighter to move and twist very effectively.

Clearly it is no accident that the fighter pilots' days are numbered. Such a plane is a conception from the past. The terrific emphasis on the rocket interceptor missile program is calculated to produce results.

The way to knock down a high-

flying bomber is to use the sure and inevitable punching fist of ground-to-air guided missiles.

Acceleration of maneuverability mean nothing to the rocket. As long as its motor has fuel it goes directly to its course. Let the target wiggle—there is no evasion. With this in mind, air defense is coming up with a series of interceptor rockets which will home on anything including optical sighting!

Imagine yourself at seventy thousand feet in a bomber when the defense missiles start coming up! What do you do? You try for altitude and use your radar jamming hoping that they're radio-guided. Altitude though is the only real answer—and pretty soon you're so high you can't call your vehicle a bomber any more—it's a space ship. The science of air defense and attack is changing so fast you don't know what you are!

★ ★ ★



A life-sapping alien intelligence barred
Kirk from making Venus safe for colonization;
it was a battle for survival, odds favoring —

THE DRAINERS

by

Robert Moore Williams

A click sounded in the tiny phone behind Lieutenant Kirk's left ear. The worried voice of Captain John Esk came down from the ship circling far above. "Tim?"

"Yes, sir."

"How's it going down there?"

"We're doing fine, except for Johnson, who has severe nausea."

Esk's snort came clearly through the phone. "I don't blame him for that. I'd have it too, if I was down there. How's the installation going?"

"So-so. The boys have got the jaws of the trap installed. They're working on the bait."

"Good." Esk sounded pleased. "Where are you personally?"

"Watching the detectors. We've set them up just outside the lock of the life boat?"

"Why don't you leave them inside the boat?" Esk sounded wor-

ried now.

"The steel hull cut down the range too much. If we left the detectors inside, they might be on us before we knew it." Both Esk and Kirk knew what *they* meant.

"Don't let them slip up on your crew, Tim. That's the way the men of the third life boat went."

"You don't have to remind me of it," Kirk said. "I remember. I was with the crew that brought back the bodies." Grimness appeared in his voice.

"Have you - - have you - - " The captain hesitated. "Have you seen - - "

"No," Tim Kirk said bluntly. "And what is more important, they haven't smelled us out."

"Good!" Captain Esk sounded relieved. "Remember, if you sight one, you are to abandon the installation."

"Glad to, sir. If - -"



"If what?"

"If we have enough time," Tim commented. "Those things can move real fast, you know."

"Damn it, you'll have enough time, if your detectors are operating properly. Those things radiate so heavily they can be picked up for miles. Their band is so broad you can't miss it. Are your detectors operating properly?"

"I'm looking at them right now. The lights are green on all bands. Not a single red flicker - - " He ducked and swore as a small round object dropped from the huge tree above his head.

"A drainer?" Esk demanded. "Have you picked one up?"

"No. It was a squirrel."

"Did you say a *squirrel*?" Esk demanded.

"A small, furry animal that lives in trees, eats nuts, and drops them on the heads of people he doesn't like. On Earth, we would call him a squirrel."

"What is he doing?"

"Dropping nuts on us. Connaught has already got beaned. I'll bet they don't - - " Tim let his voice trail off.

"You'll bet they don't what?" Esk asked. The captain was determined to leave no question unanswered.

"That they don't like us humans. It's also possible that they may be acting as spies for the drainers," Tim said, lapsing into fantasy.

"Have you gone nuts down there in that jungle?" Acid ripped from the captain's voice.

"No, but I'm working on it. It would be a relief." Tim wiped sweat from his face and thought longingly of ice cubes tinkling in a tall glass. "Why do we want this damned planet anyhow? It's all jungle."

"There's no more jungle on it than there was on Earth once," Esk retorted. "We want it because more millions of people than we can count need new lands. They call that *population pressure*, boy. If we can drain it off by opening Venus to colonization - - "

"I know all that. I went to

school," Tim answered, with an injured air. "Why don't we all just stay home and kill off the surplus population by fighting wars, the way we used to do? It would be simpler than fighting drainers. Or we could stop breeding - - "

"Stop breeding? Now I know you're nuts! Over and out," Esk said, breaking radio contact.

Thunk went another nut in front of Tim. Looking up into the spreading branches of the huge tree under which the life boat was hidden, he saw a sharp, furry face with two bright eyes looking down at him. "The drainers will get you too, if you don't watch out!" Tim threatened. He knew his threat was probably pointless. The squirrels and the drainers both existed on the same world. Any life form that existed on the same planet with the drainers had learned how to out-wit, out-run, or out-fight them. He stuck his head into the open lock and yelled, "Johnson!"

The engineer's muffled voice came from the direction of the wash room.

"Come out of there!"

"I don't dare, Tim," Johnson protested.

"There's nothing out here but squirrels and they're not dangerous if you're good at dodging. I have not seen a drainer. You watch the

detectors while I lend a hand installing the trap."

"That wasn't what I meant," Johnson said.

"Oh," Tim said with understanding. "You come anyhow. That's an order."

The engineer, mingled white and red showing on his face appeared in the lock in response to the order. "Damn it, Tim, you know I have a sick stomach."

"You stay here and watch these detectors," Kirk said, an ominous note in his voice. Leaving the engineer still protesting, he picked his way over the protruding roots of the big tree to the little glade on the other side of it where three men stripped to the waist were busy installing the trap.

Connaught, the electronic technician, was finishing his adjustment of a six inch long rod surmounted by a quarter inch semicircle of copper ribbon. This was a transmitting aerial. It was also the bait of the trap. Below Connaught, Somer was very carefully adjusting something inside a heavy plastic box which held the jaws of the trap. McCabe was busy tamping dirt tight around one of the three stout steel legs which supported the entire device.

Connaught and McCabe were very busy but out of the corners

of their eyes, each was watching Somer. He was the hot man. If he made a mistake and let the plunger carry its small but virtually important load of radio-active mass into the matrix, a smart human being would drop whatever he was doing and would run like hell. A man could stand the radiations from this box at close range for perhaps thirty seconds. He might stand them for a minute. Two minutes were too many minutes.

Back on Earth men had invented an ingenious way to destroy mosquitos. They had constructed a box with concave ends tapering inward. Inside this box they had mounted a supersonic generator which had imitated the mating call of the female.

Male mosquitos had come from miles distant to investigate this luring summons. Sure that a love hungry female was inside, they had persisted until they had found one of the openings into the box. Once inside, they had eventually landed on the liquid that covered the bottom. Exit Mr. Mosquito.

On Venus, this idea was being adapted in an effort to reduce the population of a life form infinitely more vicious and deadly than even malaria carrying anopheles - - the creatures called the drainers.

The drainers didn't bite humans, they didn't infect them with a

deadly disease. Instead, they drained the energy from the human body. A man was walking along. He heard a thin, high piercing note but paid no attention to it. He felt a little tired. He sat down to rest for a few minutes.

He never got to his feet again. Instead his lifeless body, drained of all energy, slumped to the ground.

Almost silent in motion, visible only as rising heat waves are visible, able to fly very rapidly, a life form that consisted of almost pure energy and lived exclusively on this primal stuff, the drainers were a scourge that would stop all human colonization on the Veiled Planet, unless they could be eliminated.

Careful investigation bought and paid for with human lives had disclosed that the drainers did not detect the presence of their prey by sound or smell. Instead, they were able to detect the presence of a living body by the radiations from it.

The tiny aerial that Connaught was adjusting, and the compact transmitter under it, radiated on the same band of frequencies as the human body. This was the bait. Operating automatically fifty-nine minutes of every hour, it would attract every drainer that came within miles of it. Then it

would shut off. A plunger in the lower box would shove a tiny cube of metal home into its matrix. The result would not be an atomic explosion. No such devastating effect was needed. Instead the surrounding area would be bathed in a hell-broth of red-hot particles and radiations. After one minute of this, the plunger would be withdrawn by its automatic machinery and the luring radiation would begin again.

During that minute all the drainers in the vicinity would die. Every human hoped their death would be horrible.

"Careful with that plunger," Tim said to Somer. At his words, Connaught and McCabe turned startled eyes toward the hot man.

"You think I haven't got good sense?" Somer answered, with an injured tone of voice.

During the fifty-nine minute period while the plunger was withdrawn, the trap could be approached with safety for inspection or necessary repairs.

In time, these devices would clear the hotlands of Venus of their most evil and vicious life form.

Connaught made a final adjustment of the transmitter and came down from the top of the short ladder he had been using. He sat on the lower rung and wiped sweat from his face. "Hot in this hell,"

he said. He was a tall man with the face of a benevolent satyr.

"Yeah, it is," Tim agreed. "How much longer?"

"Maybe ten minutes for my job," Somer answered.

"I can quit any time," McCabe said. "These legs will stand."

"Mine is all finished," Connaught said. "We're on the air."

"What's that?" Tim demanded. He felt his stomach muscles tighten and heard a snarl in his voice.

CONNAUGHT'S FACE went white. "When you told Somer to be careful with that plunger, you distracted my attention. I closed the switch without noticing what I was doing. My God!" He ran up the ladder. Jerking open the cover of the transmitter, he rammed his hand into it. A switch clicked there. His legs were rubber limber as he came down the ladder.

"I didn't think - - I didn't realize." Sweat was really pouring from his face now.

"All you have done has been to sound the mess call for every drainer within miles, and you've done it over a loudspeaker!" Tim said grimly.

"I know it!" Connaught's right cheek had developed a tic. As he looked hastily around the glade, his eyes were those of a madman. Overhead the leaves of the jungle

trees dripped with moisture. Thin shafts of sunlight filtered through to the ground. No twisting, shifting, darting mass of heat waves was visible. The four men listened until their ear drums popped. No zinging sound was in the air. "I guess they didn't hear my call," Connaught said.

"Get busy on that plunger mechanism," Kirk said to Somer, who had stopped working. "We're clearing out of here as soon as you finish."

"Maybe we ought to beat it now, while we can," Somer answered.

"Johnson will warn us if there is any danger," Tim said. "Hey, Johnson!" There was no answer.

"That weak-stomached engineer had to go again," Tim Kirk said, swearing. "I'll go watch the detectors myself. I'll yell if they show red." Moving on the run, he headed back for the life boat that they were using for exploration of these jungles. "I'll flush that Johnson down the drain for leaving his job!" he thought.

Johnson lay sprawled on the ground before the lock. He had made it to the wash room. But he hadn't made it back. During the period when he had been absent from the detectors something had come out of the jungle.

It was still present.

Tim Kirk caught a glimpse of a

shifting maze of what looked like heat waves hovering above the engineer's body. The drainers were not matter in any sense of the meaning of the word. They were energy creatures. Light waves passing through their strange bodies were distorted and twisted, resulting in a shifting, shimmering effect that was similar to a mirage.

Had Connaught's inadvertent starting of the radio transmitter called this drainer out of the jungle or had it drifted by the ship in its eternal quest for the energy that was its life blood? It was here. Nothing else mattered.

Kirk's first impulse was to try to dart past it and into the life boat. Nothing could be done for Johnson now, he knew. He checked this impulse. "Hey!" he called softly over his shoulder.

Alarmed silence answered him from the glade on the other side of the tree. Then Connaught's voice, tense with sudden fear, came, "Is one coming?"

"It's already here. It got Johnson."

"The devil - -" Somer's startled exclamation had sudden pain in it. He and Johnson had been buddies.

"Don't come running," Tim Kirk ordered. "It's between us and the ship."

"Then we can't get aboard?" Connaught called.

"Not as long as it's here."

The silence in the glade became frantic. The thoughts passing through his mind were equally frantic. The impulse to run pounded in every muscle of his body.

"How are we going to get into the boat?" McCabe called.

"I've been thinking about that," Kirk answered. Why were his throat muscles so stiff he could hardly talk? Didn't he want to say these words? "I'm going to lure it that way." To his surprise, his left arm was capable of pointing. "It has fed now and is probably a little sluggish?" Where had this utterly false rationalization come from? "As soon as I get it out of the way, you head for the lock, fast."

He could almost hear the thinking of the three men behind him. "What about you, Tim?" Connaught called. "How will you get back to the boat?"

"You go to hell! This is an order. Obey it!" Was this his voice that was so unnaturally sharp?

"Okay, if you say so," Connaught answered doubtfully. "But - - well - -"

"What have you got on your mind?"

"Goodbye, Tim," Connaught an-

swered.

"You can go to hell twice!" Kirk shouted. He moved toward the life boat. The drainer was still hovering over Johnson's body. Having no ears, it could not detect vibrations in the human range.

Why were his muscles suddenly as heavy as lead? Had gravity increased? A product of his overworked imagination, the thought was silly and he knew it. Was something that was called *population pressure* back on Earth pulling at him with a weight that seemed to be tons? No! This was the pressure that was moving him toward the life boat and in the direction of sudden death. It was funny that such an intangible as *population pressure* could exert so much influence across millions of miles of space. Funny? He wasn't laughing.

Since the drainers had no eyes but depended on other methods of perception instead, he could not say that the drainer ever saw him. But it sensed his presence. Darting upward from Johnson's body, it hovered fifteen feet in the air.

TIM FLED to the left. Once he released the impulses in those leaden muscles, they exploded into action. He ran like a madman, like a man pursued by devils. Jungle briars tore his legs. He did not

feel the deep cuts they were inflicting. He ran headlong into a tree and hardly felt the impact.

Why was he sitting on the ground? Why was his head reeling? The sight of the tree he had struck told him the reason. His head whirling, he got groggily to his feet. Where was the drainer? It should have overtaken him. He should be dead by now. Dead with Johnson, his body sprawled on the ground of Venus, every erg of energy sucked from it!

"Maybe I am dead and don't know it!" he thought, then began looking around for his body. Abruptly, he stopped such thinking. That way lay madness. He saw the drainer. It had not left its position above the lock of the boat.

"Come on, chase me!" he yelled.

The drainer did not move. Yelling and waving his hands to attract its attention, he went closer. The drainer still did not move. He felt foolish and stupid. In his secret heart he knew he had been trying to act the hero by getting it to chase him, thus risking his life to give the others a chance to get into the boat and escape. "You're a sham hero!" he thought. "Or aren't drainers dangerous?"

The sight of Johnson's body lying on the ground told him how fallacious this conclusion was.

"Connaught?" he called.

There was no answer. Glancing toward the tripod supporting the trap, he could not see the others. "Probably hiding in the jungle waiting for me to lure this thing out from in front of the lock," he thought.

Tim picked up a stone and flung it at the drainer. The creature dodged expertly. The stone struck the hull of the boat, which rang with a hollow sound. As if stung by this challenge, the drainer moved forward. This time he did not have to tell himself to run.

Ziiiiiiiiinnnnng!

His heels tore grooves in the ground as he came to a halt. The drainer was directly in front of him. It had overshot its target. He turned and fled blindly to the right. The knowledge and the fear of death were on him.

Ziing!

Again it was directly in front of him.

He turned to the left and kept running.

Zing! For the third time it blocked his path. Now he realized it was not overshooting its target but was deliberately playing with him in a cat and mouse fashion. Fully charged and not in need of additional energy, it was having fun with him. Its kind of fun! A few moments later he discovered

that a purpose lay back of the so-called fun. By appearing in front of him if he tried to go in any other direction, it was moving him toward the trap.

The dim thought was in his mind that at least the others had had their chance to reach the boat. He was glad about that. True, he had not heard the clang of the closing lock, but perhaps the noise he had made running had drowned that sound.

Like an old-time cowboy in the old American west, the drainer herded Tim Kirk toward the trap the humans had built for its kind.

Ahead, moving out of the jungle and into the glade, he caught a glimpse of Connaught. A drainer was herding him too. Then McCabe and Somer came into sight. Each had his almost invisible herdsman floating lazily, but hungrily, through the air above his head.

"Somer!" Tim shouted. "Make a break and shove that plunger home!"

This was a desperate hope. Or was it no hope at all?

Somer turned a frightened face toward him. "Do you think I'm crazy? Those radiations will kill a human too!"

"It will kick out automatically in one minute. A man can stand the stuff that long!"

Somer's frozen face showed no

comprehension. Either he did not understand or he was too frozen with fear to make the attempt. Cursing, Tim leaped forward. His feet became tangled in the protruding roots of the big tree and he fell headlong.

The drainer buzzed above him. It had intelligence of a kind not comprehensible to a human, enough to enable it to understand that this victim had tried to escape.

As Tim tried to rise to his feet, he knew it was upon him.

Claws rasped on back. Kirk glanced toward the tree in time to see the squirrel come swiftly down the trunk. He knew it was not coming to help him, that it had no interest in him. Its sole motive lay in the fact that it hated drainers too. Long centuries of adaptation to life in these jungles had given the squirrel a weapon not only to implement its hate but to save its own life. Its tail lifted. Tim expected a burst of nauseous gas like that emitted by an Earth skunk. No gas came. So far as his eyes could tell, nothing happened. But he felt a sudden prickling of his skin and he knew that the squirrel, instead of releasing an

odorous spray, had discharged a flood of strong radiation.

Zinging, the drainer fled.

Tim leaped to his feet, dashed to the tripod, and shoved the plunger home.

Violent flurries took place in the air around him as the radiations struck the energy drainers.

"Run like hell!" Tim shouted.

Fleeing from the deadly radiations, the drainers tried to run and succeeded in dying. The humans had better luck. They reached the life boat.

Inside the little vessel, Tim shook his fist at the monstrous jungle and its equally evil and monstrous denizens. He hated drainers with a fury that knew no bounds. "That's for all of you!" he shouted. "All of you! Except that squirrel!"

The little furry animal had learned how to lick the vicious energy sucking creatures of its native jungle. If it could learn how to do this, humans could too. Off on the next outward planet in space, the population pressure eased. Tim Kirk did not know or care about this. He was feeling a sudden fondness for the squirrel.

DON'T MISS THIS GREAT ACTION NOVEL:—

"BRING BACK MY BRAIN"

by Dwight V. Swain

Featured in the April issue of IMAGINATION, on sale January 24th

As an Earth colony the planet left much to be desired. It had a tyrant running it, the natives were fearful, and no food made it a—

HUNGRY WORLD

by

Randall Garrett

MIKE RATH LAY on the floor of the back seat of the swamp tractor and kept his eyes closed. He didn't want the man who was watching him to know he was conscious, now that he had managed to free his hands and was working on his feet. So far, in the dark interior of the swamp tractor, the watcher hadn't even seen Mike's slight movements.

The driver in the front seat said, "How much farther you wanta go, Sam?"

The man in the back said: "A few more miles. We want to make sure this bird's body is never found. The boss said he doesn't want any slip-ups."

Mike clenched his teeth in anger. No, Zamenkov wouldn't want any slip-ups. For over a year, now, Zamenkov had been ruling the colonists at Rigel City with an iron hand - - and he didn't want the

Interstellar Colonial Commission to find out about it.

Mike was a biologist. For three years, he and his wife had been out in the swamps and forests of Rigel VI, classifying and recording the characteristics of the alien plants and animals of the planet.

He and Marsha had established a small base camp and taken supplies enough for three years. When they ran low, Mike had taken the jet-copter back to Rigel City - - and immediately found himself in a jam.

He had been arrested by Zamenkov's police as soon as he climbed out of his copter. He had tried to identify himself, but it had been obvious that they hadn't believed him. In spite of his identity card, they had taken him to Norman Zamenkov himself.

Zamenkov was a great, broad-shouldered, grossly fat man with pale skin and pale blond hair that



clung damply to his pink scalp. His blue eyes -- so light they almost looked white -- peered out from wreaths of flesh that surrounded them, giving him a pig-gish squint.

"You claim you've been living in the jungles for three years, eh? That's impossible. The natives hate Earthman. They'd have killed you on sight."

"But -- "

Mike had tried to explain that the natives didn't kill an Earthman unless they were molested, but the harsh voice of Zamenkov had cut him off.

"None of that; we know better.

Now -- who are you?"

"Michael Rath, as I told you. I'm a biologist, and --"

Zamenkov had reached out a hamlike hand and slapped Mike across the face. Bound though he was, Mike had tried to lunge at the fat swine who ruled Rigel City, but the guards had pushed him to the floor.

"Don't lie," Zamenkov had said coldly. "I know you're an agent for the Interstellar Colonial Commission. Where is your ship hidden?"

It hadn't done any good to try to tell Zemenkov that he didn't have a ship. The guards moved in

and batted him around for an hour before they gave up.

Finally, Zamenkov had said: "Never mind. It isn't worth it. We'll find his ship; interstellar drive energies can't be hidden from a Vidor detector." He waved a fat hand contemptuously. "Take him out in the swamp and get rid of him. We won't want his body around in case an ICC ship lands here."

And now, here he was -- lying in the bottom of a swamp tractor while he waited for Zamenkov's men to kill him.

Only he wasn't waiting hopelessly. They had bound him with heavy plasticords, but they'd made one little mistake. After they had carried him to the tractor, he had managed to slip a jungle knife out of his jacket. They had searched him for a gun, but they hadn't noticed the knife.

And now he was almost free.

"Pull her up," said the man who had been addressed as Sam.

The turbomotor of the tractor hummed a little as the clutch was released and the vehicle rolled to a stop.

The driver turned on a searchlight and pointed it off to one side. "How about that? There's a fairly deep pond, down that way. We can toss him in there, and the marshlobsters will have taken care of the corpse by tomorrow."

"Good idea, Harry," Sam said.

"Let's go."

Harry, the driver, climbed out of the front seat and came around to open the rear door. Sam reached down to lift Mike up from the floor.

As the door opened, Mike exploded into action. He slammed his fist up into Sam's face and leaped out the door, bowling Harry over into the mud of the swamp. Then he took a long, diving leap into the waters of the shallow swamp pond.

He hit the water in a flat dive, gliding across it, just underwater, on his own momentum.

He came up for breath under the protection of a lush spread of heavy grass, his head hidden by the tall blades. Warily, he looked back at the tractor.

Neither of the men was out of action. Harry was shouting and aiming the searchlight while Sam fired bolts of energy from his heat-pistol at the spot where Mike had disappeared. The water boiled furiously for a second each time the searing rays touched it. After three or four shots, he stopped.

"Play that light around, Harry. He still may have gotten away."

Mike held his breath. He hoped they wouldn't start firing into the grass; he couldn't possibly stand up and run.

And then his attention was attracted by a ripple in the water. It was only a dark bulge in the pond, but Mike recognized it for

what it was -- an aquasaur, a water-lizard. Like the Earth crocodile, it was viciously carnivorous, and, even worse, it could breathe both air and water. It had obviously been aroused by Mike's plunge into the swamp -- and it was coming straight for him!

FOR A FEW SECONDS, Mike was not sure what to do. If he stood up to run, Zamenkov's men would shoot him -- but if he stayed crouched in the stagnant swamp water, the aquasaur would get him.

But the matter was taken out of his hands. Harry, guiding the spotlight, suddenly shouted, "There he is!"

The heat-beam was pointed directly at the aquasaur's head. Almost instantly, two heat beams lashed out at the moving head of the monster. There was an odor of scorched flesh and a strangely human cry as the aquasaur vanished beneath the boiling water.

Then there was silence for a moment.

At last, Sam said: "Well, that got him. Come on -- let's go report back to Zamenkov."

As the swamp tractor pulled away from the pond and slowed off into the distance, Mike pulled himself, dripping, from the reeds and stood up on a fairly firm section of ground. What was he to do now? His wife was several hundred

miles away, running dangerously short of supplies. The native plants weren't edible, and she had no means of transportation, now that Zamenkov had confiscated Mike's 'copter.

He stood there indecisively for a moment -- and felt something probe at his back. He froze. He was able to recognize a spear-point when he felt one.

There was a chattering hiss from behind him. It was, Mike knew, the sibilant language of the Rigelian natives. The being was saying, "If you value your life, Skyman, do not move."

Skyman -- the native term for Earthman. Mike wished to heaven he *was* up in the sky right now, going back to Marsha in his jet-copter.

"I will not move," he hissed back. "I value my life as I respect yours."

There was a slight lessening of the pressure of the spear against his back. "You speak our language well. I heard the odd barkings of those others as they spoke in your barbaric tongue. It is queer that the same mouth can utter our own beautiful language as well."

"I have lived with your people for a long time," Mike said. "I am the Hunter of Everything."

Again the pressure lessened. "The Skyman Who Hunts All Animals? Ah. I have heard of

you -- if it is truly you. I would have slain you instantly if it had not been for the fact that I saw our enemies try to kill you with the Light That Burns."

"Enemies? Why should the Skyman be our enemies?"

"It is only in the last year that it is so," the Rigellian said. "These new rulers of the Skyman's village drove out all our people's women and enslaved the men for their mines."

So *that* was it! The mines! Vodium, an ultrahard isotope of tungsten, had been discovered on Rigel VI several years before. But until machinery -- robot-operated tools -- could be brought in, it couldn't be mined; vodium was too radioactive for it to be possible for any human to work in the mines, even with a radiation suit. So Zamenkov was forcing the natives to do the work -- and reaping the profit for himself.

No wonder he was afraid of the Interstellar Colonial Commission, Mike thought. Slavery was a capital offense under the Interstellar Agreement!

"May I turn around?" Mike asked.

"Yes. You may turn, Skyman."

He turned slowly and saw, not one, but five of the Rigellians. The others had remained silent. They stood half a head taller than Mike, who was an inch over six feet. Their

blue skins were dark in the faint moonlight, but their luminous red-orange eyes glowed like live coals.

"Come," said the Rigellian, pointing through the swamps. "We will go to our Wise Old One. We will see whether you are he whom you claim to be."

THE WISE OLD ONE of the village was more wrinkled than the younger men, and his skin had faded slightly from the normal royal blue which blended so well with the Rigellian vegetation, but he was still strong, and held himself erect as a leader should.

"The Skyman Who Hunts All Animals, eh?" He stood there, the firelight from the community fire-pit flickering over his wrinkled face. "If that is so, where is your lady?"

"At my camp to the west, Wise One. As you know, we Skyman cannot eat your food; it makes us ill and does not nourish us. I went to the City of the Skyman to get more food and equipment, but I left her behind." He went on to explain what had happened in Rigel City.

"Ah," said the old man, "then this new leader is a criminal! We are glad to hear that. We have respected your people for many years, and it pained us to see that you had betrayed us."

"We hadn't. Zamenkov has all the guns. My people fear him too."

The Wise One nodded. "We will check on your story," he said.

All that night, the drums of the Rigellian swamp people throbbed in the damp air, beating out a message that travelled westward, from village to village, over the hundreds of miles that separated Mike from his wife. Not until late the next morning was the answer received. And by then, Mike himself was getting hungry.

The Wise One came to the hut where Mike had been guarded through the night and said, "We have received word from our brothers that your story is true. Forgive us for doubting."

Mike grinned. "Forget it. It was only natural." Then he frowned uneasily. He could still hear the throbbing of the drums. "What's going on?"

The Wise One drew himself up proudly. "Skyman Who Hunts All, for a long time you have befriended our people. You have showed us how to make better traps and how to make better points for our spears. You have been good to our sick and our injured. You have helped us when we were in need. Your fame has spread all over the world.

"And now it is you who need help. You and your lady need food - - the food of Skyman. We will help you get it."

Mike's frown grew deeper. "Help

me? How?"

The old Rigellian gestured toward the throbbing drum.

"We have decided. We will attack the city and get food for you. And at the same time we will avenge ourselves for our brothers who have been enslaved."

Mike shot to his feet. "No! you wouldn't stand a chance! Zamenkov's heat beams would cut you down by the hundreds - - by the thousands! Many of your people would die, and many of the innocent Skyman would die. No, that isn't the way, Wise One."

"Have you a better plan?"

Mike rubbed his jaw. "I think so. Listen - -"

RIGEL CITY, like the ancient cities of medieval Earth, was walled. The walls had originally been built to keep out wild beasts and the jungle. The site of the city had been marshland, originally, but the colonists had used pumps and Jenkins inversion driers to take the water out of the mud and convert what was left to solid ground, doing on a small scale what the Netherlands had been doing for a thousand years. But now the walls served another purpose. They were manned by Zamenkov's men, armed to repel any native uprising.

The spaceport was several miles from the city itself; accidents can happen when a ship lands or takes

off, and spaceports aren't good places to construct cities around.

With a group of tough, jungle-bred natives, Mike Rath headed for the spaceport as soon as the fuzzy red globe of Rigel had set beneath the horizon.

The spaceport, too, was walled, but it wasn't guarded. Why guard a square mile of flat, hard cement-alloy? No Rigellian plant could grow there, no animal could find anything to kill, and no native would bother to take revenge on an empty plain.

Of course, it wasn't completely empty; Mike knew that. There was always a man on duty in the blockhouse. In the unlikely event that a spaceship should land, there had to be someone on duty to turn on the landing beams and the lights to illuminate the field at night.

Quietly, Mike and the ten Rigellians boosted each other over the wall. Mike hauled the last man up with a grass rope.

In absolute silence, they walked to the blockhouse, a great, thick walled structure designed to protect its occupants against accidental mishaps such as out-of-control spaceships.

Keeping well in the shadows, the Rigellians surrounded the structure. Then Mike Rath walked boldly up to the heavy, transparent plexisteel door. His clothing was muddy and he looked as though he'd

been going through hell -- which he had. He actually was almost as tired and hungry as he looked.

He slammed his hand against the door. The man inside looked up, startled. He peered into the darkness and then turned on the intercom that allowed him to speak through the door.

"What do you want?"

"I got locked out of the city gates," Mike said, hoping his voice sounded desperate enough. "Let me in."

The guard was unsuspicious. The only thing he had to fear was the natives, and it would never occur to him that any Earthman would be in league with the blue-skinned Rigellians. He opened the door.

And the room was suddenly filled with natives.

Taking care of the guard was the work of a moment. Mike exchanged clothes with him and said, "All right. Now we'll take the tunnel to the city."

THE LONG UNDERGROUND tunnel that led to the city from the spaceport was wide and well-lighted. As they reached the ramp that led up to the terminal at Rigel City, Mike signalled the Rigellians to be silent. Then he strode up the ramp.

The guard at the top of the ramp was half-dozing as Mike stepped into view. He blinked sleepily and

said: "What's the matter, Ed? You ain't -- hey!"

He had seen, suddenly, that it wasn't his friend, but by then it was much too late; Mike had slugged him with a rabbit punch to the neck.

He gestured to the Rigellians. "Okay. You know what to do." They nodded and left the terminal building, disappearing into the darkness while Mike, alone, headed for the Government Building.

He walked straight up to one of the gates in the high fence that surrounded the building. The man on duty paid absolutely no attention -- and an accurately-thrown rock made sure he wouldn't pay attention for a long time.

Mike took the man's gun, trussed him with his own belt, and dumped him in the shadows behind the guard shack.

Then he waited.

It was nearly five minutes later that a siren wailed over the city. The phone in the guard shack rang.

Mike picked it up. "Yeah?"

"Something's happened," said a voice from the other end. "The natives have opened the main gate to the city! Keep your eyes open!" There was a click as the circuit was broken.

This was it! With the soldiers distracted by the uprising at the gate, no one would notice that

there was an extra man moving around. Within a few seconds, there were uniformed men running all around the building. Mike found it ridiculously easy to trot over to the main entrance, take an elevator up to Zamenkov's suite, and step in.

Zamenkov was alone. He was barking orders into a visophone, and he snapped it off and looked up at Mike in irritation. "What are you --"

Then his eyes widened as he saw the gun levelled at him and recognized the face.

Neither man said a word as Mike walked over to the screen and changed the code signals. He was going to put a call through on the interstellar radio to the ICC.

He took his eyes off Zamenkov for just a fraction of a second to check the frequency indicator -- and that was just a fraction of a second too long. Zamenkov's ham-like hand picked up a heavy paperweight and threw it with the accuracy of a baseball pitcher, knocking the gun from Mike's hand.

Then he charged.

Zamenkov was big and slow on his feet, but quick with his fists. His first punch knocked Mike back against the wall, but Mike dodged agilely around and clubbed down on the back of Zamenkov's head.

The big man whirled heavily, only to meet a desperate assault. Mike's fists tattooed his chest and stomach, then smashed upward at his face. Zamenkov sagged backward, out cold.

Mike reached for the Visophone

again. "Give me ICC," he said crisply. While he waited, he glanced longingly at the huge refrigerator that the fat man had installed in his office. He hoped it had plenty in it - - he was starving.

THE END

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF IMAGINATIVE TALES, published bi-monthly at Evanston, Illinois for March 1957.

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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails, or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from dally, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only).

WILLIAM L. HAMLING, Editor

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1956.

(SEAL)

S. J. PELZ

(My commission expires May 27, 1960)

★ Automation's Horrors... ★

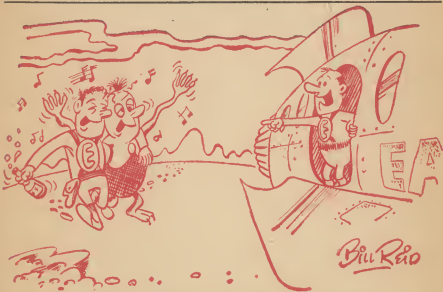
IT appears as if things have quieted down a bit since the last scientists warned of the horrors of automation! The best now believe that, instead of tremendous numbers of unemployed people, displaced from their jobs by machines, (the first writers were actually afraid of this) a new leisure will be given us—not to mention abundance.

Automation is as inevitable as taxes, and a sensible resignation or appreciation of this fact is going around the world. Science has given the machine a brain, minute perhaps, but never-the-less so useful

that it is able to replace humans in many unpleasant repetitive tasks. Furthermore it is tireless.

This miracle developed under a moral capitalistic system will so benefit everybody that there is no longer any question of its dangers. We control the automatic machines—not they us!

When you pass through Detroit next time, visit a motor block plant and observe the way the bulk of the world's work will be done a few decades hence. Is it good?—of course it is—just look at our standard of living!



"Here comes Gibson, and I think he's struck up a friendship with one of the inhabitants! . . ."

The Man Who Hated Noise

by

S. M. Jenneshaw

Mr. Pimms was irritated with the world about him. Nothing but talk of war and blaring TV commercials. But his machine would stop it!

“**E***XTREE! Extree!*
“Soviet refuses U. S.
terms! International ten-
sion builds! Reedallabout it!”

Mr. Pimms snarled bitterly at the echoing shout of the newsboy on the sidewalk fourteen floors below. Angrily, he walked over and slammed down the window. The noise made him wince.

Even with the window closed, the raucous blare of horns and the throaty rumble of trucks from the distant streets below pounded against Mr. Pimms' ears.

Noise! People were always making noise! It almost seemed a deliberate campaign to torture him.

Well, just wait. Mr. Pimms would show them. He'd give to the world the device it had so long needed.

He smiled contemplatively at the array of wires and tubes on his desk. There was just a little

more work to do, and then the Pimms Silencer would — at long last — be a reality.

He sat down and went to work with a soldering iron and pliers, attaching the components according to the complex wiring diagram he had drawn up.

As he completed some elaborate joinings of micro-transistors, Mrs. Barnaby, in the next apartment, turned on her TV set.

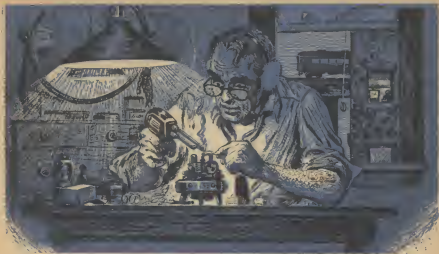
“What gets all the kiddies’ votes?”

A great big bowl of WHEE-TIE-OATS!”

The strident singing commercial was repeated two or three more times. Mr. Pimms cursed under his breath and tried to concentrate on what he was doing.

“And now, Fenton Quimby, with the news,” said the TV.

Mr. Pimms sighed, got up, and walked over to a wall cabinet. He



took out a pair of earmuffs.

"In case of any danger, everyone is requested to keep cool and go to the H-Bomb-proof shelters. You will be given plenty of warning," said Fenton Quimby importantly.

Mr. Pimms put on the earmuffs, reducing the droning voice of the news analyst to a mere mumble. Then he went back to his work.

He was almost through when a song came blaring through the wall.

"I love you, but I'm apprehensive;

*Keeping you is too expensive;
You've got me on the defensive,*

Still, I love you baby!"

Mr. Pimms snorted angrily and

got up. He walked to his door, opened it, went down the hall and knocked on Mrs. Barnaby's door.

WHEN she opened it, he said:

"Mrs. Barnaby, would you please turn down your TV set? I can hardly hear myself think."

The woman's face wrinkled. "Mr. Pimms, you never do anything but complain. I keep that set turned down so low that I can hardly hear it myself, and you know that."

"You don't need to shout!"

"I am not shouting, Mr. Pimms!" she bellowed. "I am using a normal tone of voice instead of that anemic whisper that you seem to think is a full speaking voice." She slammed the door in

his face, and the explosion of sound shook him clear down to his toes. He glared at the bare door for a moment, almost convulsed with anger.

Then he stalked back into his room. The song was still going.

*"I sure take an awful beating;
I know, dear, that you've been
cheating;
Still, it's humble pie I'm eating,
'Cause I love you, baby."*

Mr. Pimms got out some cotton, vaselined it heavily, and stuffed it under the earmuffs into his ears. The noise became a little more bearable. He went back to work on the Pimms Silencer.

It was nearly an hour before he finished. By that time Mrs. Barnaby had shut off the television set, so he could check his circuits in comparative ease.

When everything was finished, he put it on his night table, stared expectantly at it for a moment, and plugged it into the socket.

The wailing sound of a child's crying came through the wall. Mr. Pimms grinned savagely and jabbed the button on the Pimms Silencer.

The wail stopped. So did the noise from the street. Mr. Pimms gingerly removed the muffs and earplugs. Still no noise. He filled his lungs with air and shouted.

Or, at least, he tried to shout.

He didn't hear a thing. He was surrounded by a complete wall of silence. Feeling a pulsing beat of triumph, he walked over and opened the window. Silence. Perfect, absolute silence.

According to his calculations, the Silencer had an effective radius of thirty-five to forty feet. No noise could penetrate the invisible barrier. For the first time in his life, Mr. Pimms had the silence his soul so desperately craved.

He went back to his bookshelf, selected a book, and settled himself in his easy chair. From now on, he was going to enjoy life.

NO NOISE disturbed Mr. Pimms that afternoon. He did not hear the wailing bleat of the big siren atop City Hall. He didn't hear the bellowing voice from the Public Address truck that moved through the streets.

"ATTENTION! ATTENTION! INTO THE BOMBPROOF SHELTERS, EVERYONE! THERE IS NO NEED TO PANIC, BUT YOU MUST BE IN THE SHELTERS WITHIN THE NEXT TEN MINUTES. HURRY, BUT DON'T PANIC. THERE IS NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT. REPEAT: NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT. JUST WALK BRISKLY TO THE NEAREST SHELTER."

Mr. Pimms did not hear the scramble of feet, the honking of automobiles, the excited voices.

He did not hear the voice on Mrs. Barnaby's TV set, either.

"Ladies and gentlemen, your attention, please! Enemy bombers have been sighted coming in from the north. The Air Force is doing its best to intercept them, and there is reason to believe that they will be brought down before they do any damage!"

Mr. Pimms read quietly while anti-aircraft guns hammered at the sky, and the screaming roar of

fighter-interceptors echoed.

Mr. Pimms finished the book and, still smiling happily, walked over to the window.

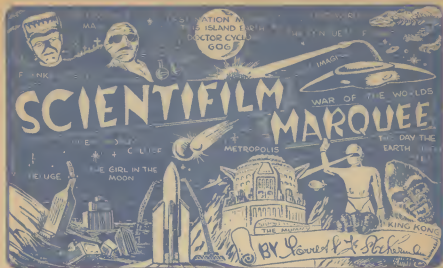
He was in time to see something bright falling toward the ground.

Then, suddenly, the sky was filled with an all-consuming brilliance. The terrible glare of a thermonuclear bomb, brighter than the sun itself, blossomed out over the city. For just a fraction of a moment, Mr. Pimms saw the awful light and felt the searing heat.

Of course, he didn't hear a thing.



"What's a restroom?"



HAVE YOU EVER met a morphosis? That's a pretty bad pun. I'm just holding my breath that it doesn't turn into an equally bad picture. The producer of *The Mole People* and *The Black Lagoon* tells me he plans to film Franz Kafka's literary phenomenon, "The Metamorphosis". Considering that Universal is Abbott & Costello's home lot, I shudder to think how the story may be metamorphosed by the time it is transferred to the screen. I can see its transfiguration right now: "The Studio that gave you *Tarantula*, *The Wolf-Man* and *Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein*, now Proudly Presents Franz Kafka's great horror classic . . . **THE COCKROACH THAT CONQUERED THE WORLD!**" I will happily be proven a pessimist. Hollywood did do a creditable job, for instance, with

Maurice Sandoz' "The Maze", one of the last of the 3-D films, released under the same name as the Dali-illustrated book and, being about a Brobdingnagian batrachian human being something like 300 years old, praiseworthy resisting the attempt to exploit the subject matter with a catchy title like **THE FROG THAT CONQUERED THE WORLD** or **WHEN THE FROG-MAN CROAKED**.

Did you know Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde had a daughter? I doubt Bob ("call me R. L.") Stevenson did, and since, according to the variety of movie versions from Barrymore thru Fredric March to Spencer Tracy, he died before he got married - - *naughty! naughty!* Anyway, somewhere, perhaps among the Dead Sea Scrolls, Hollywood has dug up the information that the good doctor (and his bad side)

had a baby girl, and she's grown up now and soon to make her debut.

At the Roach Studios (they should be filming "The Metamorphosis"!) they're hatching a kraken for a picture that was originally to be called just that, *The Kraken*. Maybe they heard about John Wyndham's "The Kraken Wakes". Anyway, they've changed the shooting title to *The Jagged Edge*. What this Scandinavian sea monster - - all 400' of it - - could be doing in the Salton Sea beats me, but I guess that's why they make such pictures: to educate the ignorant. I'll go and see.

Speaking of higher education, Universal Studios wishes, thru this column, to alert my many millions of readers to the fact that their forthcoming *Land Unknown* is not to be viewed as a sci-fi film but rather a science-FACT picture. So when you go and see a dozen different dinosauria disporting themselves at the South Pole, just bear in mind that you read it in this column first that you are seeing pure extrapolation - - "estimation of a quantity which depends on one or more variables by extending the variables beyond their established ranges." Reportedly one of the highlights of the 1947 Antarctic expedition of Adm. Byrd was the discovery of a mysterious thermal area, devoid of ice and snow, where theoretically subtropical flora and fauna could exist. It is possible life in this region that *The Land Unknown* will picture.

Brynne Foy, who dates back to *The Return of Dr. X*, will next essay production of *The Mysterious*

Island, Jules Verne's sequel to the highly successful filmization *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. Foy had planned to film "A Journey to the Center of the Earth" as well, but has bowed out in deference to the amount of work RKO has already put into preparation of the picture. Instead, he is negotiating with the estate of the late HG Wells for movie rights to the master's "The Star", one of his famous short stories about a planet from outer space that enters our solar system, collides with Neptune, and the fused bodies menace all mankind as they approach Earth, causing natural upheavals and catastrophes. Handled right, this could be what *When Worlds Collide* should have been. Hope Ned Mann, of *80 Days, Deluge, Things to Come*, etc., is engaged to create the spectacular special effects.

There's no such thing as a Ne-cronomicon, Vicarion, Quadriopticon or Panchronicon, but an Electronicam has been invented by the Allen DuMont Lab and demonstrated in Hollywood. What's it do? It provides an exact, instantaneous view of what cameras are recording on film. A time machine insofar as it saves time.

Jack Williamson has completed a 71 page original screen story, "The Planets Are Calling" . . . lb J. Melchoir and Ed Watson are engaged on a story outline for Topaz Productions called "Spawn of Hell" . . . Wilson Tucker's "Man from Tomorrow" will be filmed by Sol Lesser, which Studio will also produce Edmond Hamilton's "Pygmy Island" . . . RKO is interested

in HG Wells' "Food of the Gods" . . . Roger Corman has announced his future schedule will include "The Man Who Sold the Earth" and "Revolt in 2900", which sound suspiciously like takeoffs on the Heinlein titles "The Man Who Sold the Moon" and "Revolt in 2100"

. . . Then there's a "Boy Who Saved the Earth" (Thad Swift original) and Homer Eon Flint's "The Nth Man", which, as it is about a man who saved the world, has been retitled "The Man Who Destroyed the Earth"! That figures; you see, it was Austin Hall who wrote "The Man Who Saved the Earth" (which up in Canada they called "The Man Who Saved the World"). Now aren't you glad you aren't competing for the \$64,000 sci-fi question? Because as practically no one remembers, a story called "The Man Who Sold the Earth" was once published; it was authored by Thornton Ayre, who, as virtually no one remembers nowadays, was John Russell Fearn, an English author (tho the story was published in America). Now: Who's on third?

"Vanishing Island", a stage play product of the Moral Re-Armament group, a world-wide movement with members in over 29 nations, will be turned into an epic motion picture for 1957 release. It's an anti-commie musical of the near future.

Jacques Sernas of *Helen of Troy* is slated to star in a telepic called *The Man from 1997*, a segment of the Conflict series. It is to be produced by Roy Huggins, who is credited with authorship of at least one fantasyarn.

"The Jet-Propelled Couch" by the late Dr. Robert Lindner has been purchased by screen writer Stanley Roberts for independent production. Could be great if not goofed a la Philip Wylie's "Gladiator", which was massacred as a farcical comedy starring Joe. E. Brown as the superman.

Republic will produce *SOS, Flying Saucer Attack*, an original (?) script by Martin Van Laas. Pardon me if I sound cynical this season, it must have been something I saw.

Promised (but not especially anticipated) from Allied Artists: *Attack of the Crab Monsters*. Ditto Columbia: *Mark of the Claw*. Associated Producers will offer a snow job called *Man Beast*, about the Abominable Mi-Go men of the icy Himalayas. Edward Cahn, who directed *The She-Creature*, will next lens *Zombies of Moro-Tau*. Boris Karloff returns to the screen in *Voodoo Island*, while Marla English has been signed to star in Alex Gordon's production of *Voodoo Woman*. The title of *The Petrified Man* has been changed to *The Man Who Turned to Stone*.

United Artists is releasing *Pharaoh's Curse*, which has a reincarnation theme. Bel-Air will produce *Return of the Cat Goddess*. *The Mesa of Lost Women* is 70 minutes of mad scientist, savage beauties and giant tarantulas. *The Deadly Mantis*, with its tremendous wingspan, will soon be menacing Manhattan. RKO is double-billing *X the Unknown*, starring Dean Jagger, and James Craig as *The Cyclops*. Actress Marie Windsor has scripted *The Uranium Monster*. G.

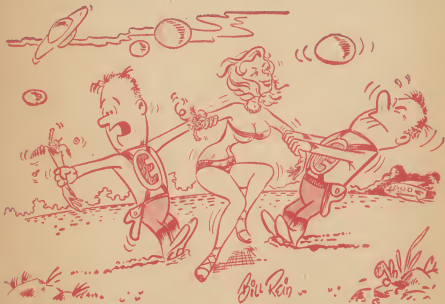
Gordon Dewey and Simon Matrii have come up with an original screen story idea, *The Earth-Watchers*. Screen siren Yvonne De Carlo has turned sci-fi scrivener for *Green Planet Sram*. Ludmilla Tcherina (Gene Moskowitz tells me) is being paged for the 4th film version of Pierre Benoit's Atlantis adventure, "L'Atalantide". Roger Corman has completed *Not of This Earth* and *The Undead*. The 27th Day is ready for release.

THANK YOU, Dave Andrews, for info about your father, Dana, who's to star in a cinemadaptation of M. R. James' "Casting the Runes" called *The Bewitched*; Ted Carnell, Tor Johnson, Martin Varno, John

Greene, Army Archerd, George Phair, Don Grollman, Ray Bradbury, Ray Harryhausen, Paul Robbins, Curt Siodmak and others for information on THE WEAPON, THE GIANT YMIR, THE FOG, UNDER THE INFLUENCE, HOUSE OF MONSTERS, GOOD AS GOLD, BEAST OF THE AMAZON, TIME BOMB, WARNING FROM SPACE, THE CARROLL FORMULA and others on which there will be further news nexttime.

—Forrest J. Ackerman

SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE is a regular feature. Columnist Ackerman may be contacted via the Beverly Hills, Calif., telephone exchange by interested contributors.



"On second thought - - you can have her!"



A department for all our readers throughout the world; here you can meet new friends who are interested in the same things you are. Listings are free, so send in yours today!

PHYSICS MAJOR

Nicholas A. Beauchamp: 422 Brown Hall, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J.

Age 20, student: "I'm a senior in physics, interested in psionics, psychology, E. S. P. and cybernetics—but not in an advanced manner on the latter. Will welcome correspondence from anyone with similar interests."

MECHANICAL ENGINEER

Kenneth Norman Herbert: 58 Aston Lane, Perry Barr, Birmingham 20, England.

Age 26: "I'm single, Very English, 5' 7" in height; science fiction and fantasy are my religion making me both shortsighted and an incurable dreamer. My interests include films, people, and sport—mainly fencing. I also like cars and square-dancing. My current occupation as a mechan-

ical engineer is in the field of light alloy weight estimation. I'll welcome correspondence from anyone on any subject. I would rather argue than eat!"

HIGH SCHOOL JUNIOR

Frank Gaylord: Route 5, Box 185, Vienna, Va.

Age 16, student: "I've been reading science fiction for three years and love it. I'd like to correspond with anyone who is interested in trading sci-fi books and magazines. I'd also like to contact any sci-fi fans in my geographical area."

CHIEF ORDER CLERK

John Hurdis: 81 Clearview Hgts., Apt. 2, Toronto, Ont., Canada.

Age 29: "I'm married and have lived in Canada for five years. I'm interested in publishing a science fiction fan magazine (have dabbled

in printing, having a press of my own) and would like to hear from other fans interested in fan magazines. I'm also very interested in joining any 'local fan groups.'"

WOULD-BE WRITER

John Butterworth: 37 Richmond Rd., Belmont 78, Mass.

Age 14, student. "I'm interested in writing and hope to follow it as a career after finishing school. I also enjoy 'rock 'n roll' (though NOT as represented by Elvis!) and at present am engaged in compiling my list of 'the best stf stories' of the year. I'll welcome correspondence from anyone else similarly inclined."

ADVANCED STUDENT

Walter H. Jogwick: 200 E. Oakland Ave., Columbus 1, Ohio.

Age 27: "I am presently working for my Master's Degree in mechanical engineering at Ohio State University. I hope to receive it before Xmas of this year. I am also interested in gas turbines, automobiles, and girls! I am, of course, single. I'd like to add that after December 20th my address will be: 1007 Dartmouth Ave., Charleston, West Va."

CIVIL SERVICE

Otis Lee Brock: 5903 88th St., SW, Tacoma 99, Wash.

Age 35: "I'm married, the father of two fine sons, 10 and 12. I'm a clerk-typist in the Post Transportation Office at Fort Lewis. My

hobby is reading and collecting science fiction, both books and magazines. I've been in the field for over fifteen years. I'd like to hear from other people in the field."

AMATEUR CHEMIST

Franklin Bergquist: Gen. Del., Ed-dyville, Iowa.

Age 16: "I'm a student, very interested in chemistry. I like comedy in science fiction and would like to hear from others with my interests."

HOUSEWIFE

Colene Newton: 330 N. Folsom, Coquille, Ore.

Age 23: "I'm the mother of two girls very interested in science fiction, and love to write letters. My husband approves! I'm especially interested in corresponding with anyone in a foreign land, and also servicemen abroad."

PLUMBER

George Roenspiess: 47 Merner Ave., Kitchener, Ont., Canada.

Age 20: "I'm interested in electronics and astronomy. I would especially like to hear from anyone interested in 'Project Vanguard'."

SOPHOMORE

Linwood Kemp: 150 West St., Wilmington, Mass.

Age 15: "I'm male—in case the first name is confusing—with chief interests: Christian Literature, for-

eign languages, and science fiction. My chief dislikes are football, baseball, and politics. Hope to hear from someone with similar likes."

NURSE

Mrs. Dorothy Shair: % Mrs. Marie Coon, 1347 E. Kern St., Ontario, Calif.

Age 30: "I have been interested in science fiction for the past eight years. My other interests include psychic phenomena, E. S. P., and study of the occult and supernatural."

COLLEGE STUDENT

Dainis Bisenieks: 303 Hinsdale House, East Quad, Ann Arbor, Mich.

Age 19: "I'm a male college student at the University of Michigan. I read all science fiction magazines and have extensive back files. Would like pen pals both female and male, near and far. I'd like to discuss current and back science fiction and fantasy. I know German and would like to contact German fans. Studying French, So same for them."

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

Wayne Roberts: 1725 Jennifer, Houston 29, Texas.

Age 15: "My occupation at the moment is centered around the Galena Park High School in Galena Park, Texas. I follow a half dozen of the science fiction magazines and am interested in exchanging ideas with others."

BOOK SALESMAN

Edward Kisch: 4873 Cochran St., Santa Susana, Calif.

Age 40: "I'm interested in writing, and also in publishing a science fiction fan magazine. I'm collecting data on stf authors and would like to hear from others with similar interests."

STUDENT

Paul Shulkes: 139 E. 53rd St., Brooklyn 3, N.Y.

Age 16: "I have been reading science fiction since the tender age of seven when I discovered Heinlein. I am interested in joining a science fiction club and would appreciate being contacted for this purpose."

STUDENT

Robert Geary: 90-26 209th St., Bellaire 28, N. Y.

Age 14: "I am a confirmed reader of science fiction, sophomore in high school; I would like to hear from anybody interested in science fiction."

STUDENT

Mike Kingston: 2141 Tulane, Long Beach 15, Calif.

Age 14: "I am six feet tall, blond, like chess, bowling, ice hockey, and football. Enjoy science fiction, love to dance, like girls, and will correspond with anyone who'll drop me a line."

NAVAL PHOTOGRAPHER

Edward L Gilroy: P.O. Box 754,
Fruitland Park, Fla.

Age 65. "I am now retired from my active profession as a naval photographer. I read plenty, write a little, paint — do black & white and color slides, grow miniature trees and make wood inlay pictures. Will welcome correspondence as I now have plenty of leisure time."

SALESMAN

Robert Kinnear: 1202 Nevada St.,
Apt. 1, Toledo 5, Ohio.

Age 26. "I'm still single, and interested in many things: photography, anthropology, languages, especially philology, and at present am working on a new system to simplify the English alphabet. Other interests include hunting, creative writing, and people and places. Would like to hear from people all over the world."

JOURNALISM MAJOR

Lee Hamilton: 308 W. 15th St.,
Lumberton, N.C.

Age 25: "I'm male, and a junior in college, majoring in journalism with minor in psychology. I'm interested in all phases of natural sciences, especially astro-physics, and astronomy. I'm very interested in hearing from others in science fiction to get to know their ideas on all facets of the medium whether it be 'hyper space' or the hidden mysteries of the human brain. Would be a pleasure to get to know all the guys and gals who love stf as I do."

RECENT GRADUATE

Dorothy Silva: 8 Atlantic Ave.,
Providence 7, R.I.

Age 18: "I'm five feet eight, brown hair and eyes, and plan to start office work soon. Have been reading science fiction for five years now, and love it. I'm also interested in ballet, classical music, and collect stamps, ballet pictures, and material on ancient history. I'd especially like to hear from those overseas."

GIFT SHOP OWNER

Rodney Lesher: 3521 Ridgeway St.,
Laureldale, Pa.

Age 25: "I have been bed-ridden with arthritis for the past eight years, so correspondence is quite important to me. I'm single, play a good game of chess, am interested in creative writing, and build model airplanes. I operate my own gift shop. Would especially like to hear from girls my age interested in science fiction."

STUDENT

Bill Meyers: 4301 Shawnee Circle,
Chattanooga 11, Tenn.

Age 14: "I have an extensive collection of science fiction, consisting of around 1000 items. I'd love to correspond and trade stf with other people. Am mostly interested in older magazines prior to 1950, with favorite authors being Haggard and Burroughs. Current favorites include Bradbury, Sturgeon, among others."

Letters from the Readers

TOP STF FILM? . . .

Dear Bill Hamling:

I have been reading some of your recent issues of IMAGINATIVE TALES and find them very interesting-

I like science fiction movies, and therefore enjoy SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE very much. It is a feature I never find in other stf magazines.

My favorite science fiction movie is CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON. I would appreciate your telling me where I might send to obtain still photos about the "Creature".

Miss Maria Terese Hrnek
403 Indiana Ave.
Chester, West Va.

Can't say we agree with your choice of stf films as a "favorite" but we do agree it was entertaining. We're still rather partial to THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL and we'll also include FORBIDDEN PLANET as a top-notch. For photos we suggest you write to the

editor of our SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE column, Forrest J. Ackerman, Addresss 915 S. Sherbourne Dr., Los Angeles 35, Cal. . . . wh

NOT ENOUGH HAMILTON!

Dear Bill Hamling:

THE COSMIC KINGS was the best piece of work Alexander Blade has ever done for TALES—the November issue. All in all now, I think you have fine illustrations. Yours would even be my favorite magazine except for the fact you don't get enough stories by Edmond Hamilton. THUNDER WORLD in the July '56 issue was a masterpiece!

James W. Ayers
609 First St.
Attalla, Ala.

Where, pray tell, do you find more Edmond Hamilton than in MADGE and TALES? Ed's one of our regu-lars, and we promise you'll be seeing many fine novels from his talented pen in the near future. Glad you liked Alex Blade's novel.

That boy's really on the ball, and he's got some terrific material coming up soon too wh

COOL ENOUGH MAN!

Dear Bill:

I just finished the November issue of **TALES** and thought I'd drop you a line. I'm only fourteen but I've been reading both **IMAGINATION** and **IMAGINATIVE TALES** for four years. (When most people I know hear of a teenager reading stf they get the impression of somebody about five feet tall and a big thick head—not to mention horn-rimmed glasses. To show you this is not the case, I'm six feet tall and play more than my share of baseball, basketball, and football. Like girls too!)

But to get back to **TALES**, the November issue was cool enough, man, and Alex Blade, as usual, turned out another great novel with his **THE COSMIC KINGS**.

On the short side, **MICROSCOPIC NIGHTMARE** and **NO TRAP FOR THE KETH** were good, but the others were barely passable. I'm sure glad to hear the news about Dwight V. Swain returning soon. Make it quick!

Mike Kington
2141 Tulane
Long Beach, Cal.

*Dwight V. Swain is featured in the forthcoming April issue of our companion science fiction magazine, **IMAGINATION**. Don't miss his great novel, **BRING BACK MY BRAIN!** And to make you even happier, he'll be featured in the May issue of **TALES** with **THE HORDE FROM INFINITY**. And*

that's just the beginning! So haunt your newsdealer for our forthcoming issues. Better yet, why don't you—and everyone else who hasn't—turn to page 130 and send in your subscription. We don't have to point out you're getting a terrific bargain—with the guarantee of many months of the best in science fiction reading!—Even if there is an occasional short you don't like. So who's perfect? wh

TOP CARTOONS

Dear Editor:

I like **IMAGINATIVE TALES** very much, but what induced me to write is your cartoons. I get quite a good laugh out of them each issue, and after finishing an issue I cut them out and send them to my son overseas. He and his buddies share in their enjoying them too.

I'd like to add here that I have learned quite a bit from your short fact articles at the ends of stories. Unlike some skeptics, I feel that space travel is as certain a reality in the near future as the telephone and electricity are today.

So I'll be digging you in the next issue, and am sure it will be an exciting one!

Mrs. Quizelle C. Allen
783 Shawmut Ave.
Boston 19, Mass.

We think you've got a good idea in sending our stf cartoons overseas. But why clip them out of the magazines? Send the entire issue so the boys can enjoy the stories too! We agree with you that space travel is just around the corner. If the truth were really known it

might surprise everybody! Science has been making rapid strides in that direction. wh

BLADE NOT FROM HUNGER!

Dear Bill Hamling:

November's short stories were strictly from hunger, and the Thames and Chase efforts smelled mightily of adaptation from other's works. However, THE COSMIC KINGS by Alex Blade was a fast-paced, interesting space opera and I loved every minute of it. I'm a sucker for a good space opera. Congratulate Blade for me.

Helen M. Urban
6520 Satsuma Ave.

North Hollywood, Cal.

We enjoy good space operas too, but we prefer to call them action-adventure stories. That's really what they are! But call them what you will—they're pleasant reading, and that's what counts. wh

EVERY BIT AS GOOD

Dear Bill:

After reading the November issue of TALES I was convinced that the magazine was every bit as good as you said it was.

The stories I enjoyed especially were THE COSMIC KINGS and NO TRAP FOR THE KETH.

Oh, yes, the cover was good—but when are you going to run another interplanetary scene like the one for the June '56 IMAGINATION which was excellent.

To show I'm convinced your magazine is good, here's my subscription.

Bruce Taylor
168 Alling St.

Kensington, Conn.

Can't think of a better way to show us, Bruce. As to the interplanetary covers, Malcolm Smith is our expert on these, and he'll have a new one for you soon. wh

TOP RATING

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I've never written to a magazine before so I guess it's about time I started!

I have bought every science fiction magazine on the stands, and since you get my first letter you'll see that yours rates at the top for me. I guess I can call myself a fan now too, since I've been reading science fiction for over a year now. Here's my sub, and keep sending us good stories!

Ronnie Coffelt
1301 S. Whitemarsh
Compton, Cal.

Welcome into the fold, Ronnie. And you can just bet we'll be sending you nothing but the best in science fiction. wh

PRETTY MEDIOCRE

Dear Bill Hamling:

For the most part, the November issue of TALES was pretty mediocre. Alexander Blade's THE COSMIC KINGS stunk! The aforementioned story was so lousy I found myself skipping whole parts of it. Tell me, how can you continue to publish such crud?

MICROSCOPIC NIGHTMARE: This should have been titled SCIENCE FICTION NIGHTMARE instead. C. H. Thames is

writing mostly crud these days. **THE VALIANT DIE HARD:** hack all the way through. And, pray tell, how does the title tie up with the story? **THE LAST ENEMY:** only decent yarn in the lot. However, as usual the two enemies, male and female, go off arm in arm. **THE RUNAWAY:** must have been printed to fill up space. Also, the lead character here acted as though he were an eight-year-old. He was *supposed* to be twelve, I believe. **NO TRAP FOR THE KETH:** I couldn't get past the third page.

I want to ask *you* a question: what do *you* think a sense of won-

der is? Personally, the only magazine that really gives me a sense of wonder is Ray Palmer's **OTHER WORLDS**. And sometimes a piece in **IF** or **GALAXY**.

To Roger Ebert: Know why "The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction" is highbrow? I'll tell you—it's the "literary" magazine of science fiction.

More covers in the current vein, please. Try to get Rognan to make his figures a bit more realistic, though. I also prefer girly, sexy type covers. They're the best, you know!

Allen Mann



"Seems mighty funny, Brinks - - this 'one for the road' has already lasted eight days!"

1090 Grand Concourse
Bronx, N.Y.

We think the stories we print in both MADGE and TALES contain a sense of wonder. So that answers your question. If you don't like them then your sense of wonder is different than ours. For an example of our point of view, any lead novel we print. You'll find plenty of inter-planetary and inter-galactic adventure, and since we feel that stories of this type represent the destiny of mankind they impart more than a share of "wonder" to us. What could be more thrilling than visiting other planets in other solar systems light years distant? Our stories allow us to do that. As to the yarns you mentioned being "crud", you'll note other reader opinions differ. wlh

WRITING A BOOK ON STF . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Although I am only 12 years of age I have been reading your magazine for some time, and I already am a confirmed science fiction fan. The same goes for my best girl friend, Carole Cushman. In fact, we're both so interested in science fiction we're writing a book!

Please keep us happy with your great magazines. As to the type of stories we like best, we pick THE MAN WITHOUT A PLANET which you ran in the July '56 issue.

Susan Powell
33 Robin Rd.
Rumson, N.J.

Glad to hear from you, Susan, and tell Carole to drop us a line sometime soon, too We'd also like

to comment here that we get many letters every month from young readers saying that they're so enthused over science fiction they're writing stories themselves. We think this is a healthy and wonderful thing for the field since the writers of tomorrow are those who are starting out now. Sure, they'll turn out pretty sad efforts in the beginning; but they'll learn. And if they have any talent they'll pass over that invisible line separating "rejects" from salable stories sometime in the future. More power to all you young people! And while we're on the subject, young people are the life blood of science fiction. We're very proud of the fact that IMAGINATION and IMAGINATIVE TALES include tens of thousands of young readers in their circulations. It's a healthy sign for the future too—since our world is rapidly embarking on an age of advanced technology. And what better field than science fiction to lay the groundwork for our future scientists! Not to mention those wonderful adventurers who one day soon will challenge and conquer outer space! Who knows, YOU may be one of them. wlh

FLYING A TRUE COURSE

Dear Bill Hamling:

The November issue of IMAGINATIVE TALES was right on the beam, flying a true course along the science fiction Milky Way

The novel, THE COSMIC KINGS, was excellent. And the rest of the stories were swell, each in their own way.

As usual, I enjoyed all the features, especially SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE. If a few of the suggested movies are produced I can look forward to some fine science fiction at my local theater!

Alan Moore's letter suggesting that each reader introduce somebody new to science fiction is a good idea. I've been doing that very thing for years! —I have found, of course, that you don't interest everybody. In my case I've succeeded in one out of five on the average.

W. C. Brandt
Apt. N
1725 Seminary Ave.
Oakland 21, Cal.

More power to you for introducing even one new reader to science fiction. It's interesting to think that if every reader was successful in getting just one new person into the field our ranks would be doubled overnight! That's something good to shoot at and we hope everyone will take part in the effort. . . wlh

BRING ON THE ALIENS!

Dear Bill:

I wish you would have underscored your statement on page 129 of the November TALES. To refresh your memory: "We feel Janice was referring to the type of yarn which makes you feel like the guy squatting in a box, arms folded, saying: 'People are no damned good!'" Now to the part for underscoring. "Science fiction is adventure into infinity—not onto a psychiatrist's couch!"

I agree. And I, for one proud individual, believe that I, as a member of the Human Race, have something unique in this universe.

If there are other beings, I'll wager an Earthman, given the chance could equal and surpass any of them. I feel I could! Bragging? No. Just a game Terrestrial! Bring on those aliens!

And keep up the good work with MADGE and TALES.

Roger A. Weir
1016 Mackinaw
Saginaw, Mich.

We'll bet you could, too! See you next issue, gang! wlh

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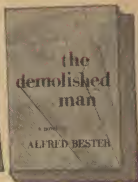
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